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1945









**G I HAD FUN**



**G I HAD FUN**





June 22, '45

To Buddy

I hope you  
enjoy this book.  
If you don't  
you can tell  
your uncle Sam

Sincerely  
Al Chack



*Acme*

The "Clown Prince of Baseball" entertains GI's in New Guinea

# GI

# HAD FUN

*BY AL SCHACHT*

*Composition and Spelling*

*By MURRAY GOODMAN*

**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK**

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Government wartime restrictions on materials have made it essential that the amount of paper used in each book be reduced to a minimum. This volume is printed on lighter paper than would have been used before material limitations became necessary, and the number of words on each page has been substantially increased. The smaller bulk in no way indicates that the text has been shortened.

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*Dedicated to my nephew,*  
LIEUTENANT CARROLL S. SCHACHT  
of the famous 101st Airborne Division.

Missing in Action

He was typical of the American GI. Working his way through the ranks for his gold bar, he played hard and he fought hard and, as can be said of thousands of our boys, "he had more guts than was good for him."

## INTRODUCTION

THE Alletti Hotel in Algiers was so crowded that full colonels were sleeping three and four deep in the lobby. We correspondents had all returned from the filth and flies of Sicily expecting to get some rest in Algiers; expecting clean sheets and soft beds and if possible real (not powdered) eggs for breakfast. We crowded into the Alletti Hotel to find that others had arrived before us. We didn't mind doubling up or tripling up or quadrupling up but we found that we had to sleep eight in a room and the rooms were so small that if you turned around quickly you would scrape the paper off the wall. There were two small beds in each room and we pushed them together and four men slept crossways on them. The four smallest. The rest of us spread our sleeping bags on the floor and the Alletti Hotel, which had very little else, had very hard wood floors.

Now in the Army there is an outfit called Special Services and when a USO troupe comes to a place like Algiers it is taken care of by Special Services. Special Services did a good job and the entertainers who arrived always had rooms practically alone. They deserved it all right and nobody minded that at all—we were merely envious of the entertainers. Now we come to Mr. Al Schacht who arrived in Algiers all alone, for Mr. Al Schacht was so good they allowed him to put on a one-man show for the troops.

He arrived at noon one day and my agent (a British sergeant filling in as room clerk) informed me that Special Services had given Mr. Al Schacht a room all to himself; a big room overlooking the bay; a room with a bath and running water; a room with two beds. I gave the room clerk a bottle of something the natives call eau de vie, a concoction that smelt like Bay Rum and tasted like the fluff off used carpets.

It was, however, the only drink sold then in Algiers and as such was highly prized. I told the room clerk not to mention Mr. Al Schacht's single blessedness to anyone; not even to a general. Then I went to his room.

He was glad to see me and I was glad to see him because we were both veterans of the New York City night shift and I had on more than one occasion eaten the very tasty steaks he serves at his 52nd Street bistro. However, it was his extra bed I wanted now, not his steaks.

"I do not know what they got against you, Al," I said to him.

"Who's got what against me?" he asked aggressively.

"I mean, like Bob Hope was here last week and they gave him an aide. Jack Benny was here, he got an aide. Everybody gets an aide, but you got no aide. You're a bum without an aide in Algiers. Everybody who is anybody has an aide. So you're a bum."

"So what do I want with an aide?" he asked suspiciously.

"You're all right if you speak the languages," I told him.

"What language?"

"French, for one," I told him. "Everybody here speaks French or Arabic. That phone will start ringing soon and it'll be all double talk to you if you don't have an aide who speaks the languages."

"I don't speak no French or Arabic," he said.

"That is bad," I said. "Suppose General de Gaulle phones and asks you to maybe do a benefit. You won't know what he's talking about. Or maybe El Hassan Ibn will call."

"Who the hell is El Hassan Ibn," Schacht asked.

"Boy, you sure do need an aide," I said sadly. "He's a very important character out here. He is head of the native troops and very close to General Eisenhower. He might want to invite you to a native feast."

"Where can I get an aide who speaks these foreign languages," Al asked anxiously.

"If only I wasn't so busy. . . . I can speak them all right," I said.



"Look," he said. "Be a pal. Help me out. I don't want to get in bad by saying the wrong thing on the phone."

"Then, too, you're deaf as a dead fish," I said. "And these phones are very bad at best. You won't even be able to hear if General Eisenhower phones you."

"What is General Eisenhower going to phone me about?" Schacht asked.

"I don't know. Maybe he wants you to tell him how to broil a bit of Spam or maybe he wants you to come over to his house for some lox and baegles or maybe kreplach. You never know with Eisenhower. He is such a nice guy he is always asking the USO people over to his shanty."

"I might miss his call, hey?" Schacht was alarmed now.

"Sure," I said. "You would feel like a fine heel then. A schliemiel. A swollitch, you'd be."

"What is that swollitch?"

"That's Russian for schliemiel," I told him.

"Maybe you could kind of stick around here," he said. "Could you? I got some . . . well, I got some chocolates and some cigarettes . . . and a bottle of Scotch."

"It would be inconvenient for me but for a pal I will do so," I said. "I will even move in with you so in case General Eisenhower or De Gaulle or El Hassan Ibn should phone in the middle of the night I will be glued by this end of the phone."

"You're a pal, a real pal," he said earnestly.

"Not many guys would do this for you, at that," I admitted. "Now from now on I am your aide. If anyone wants to see you about anything have them call me. I will be here practically all the time. Here in bed."

We had a very happy week together and then when he left, I managed to hang on to the room for another week by telling the room clerk I had a contagious disease and could not be moved. I saw Al in action and no entertainer ever gave the boys more laughs than this broken-down, deaf, rheumatic ball

player. I once complained to Al that I thought his jokes were very corny.

"They sound all right to me," he said complacently.

"You can't even hear them."

"That's right," he said. "I'm a lucky guy, hey?"

Now they have put a little window in Al's ear and he isn't deaf any more which is a pity because now he can hear his own jokes. That will be tough on Al.

Mr. Al Schacht keeps muscling into everybody else's affairs. He was a ball player with a wooden arm who couldn't throw a ball past a traffic light so he gave that up and became a professional comedian. Then he became dissatisfied with the service at some of his favorite restaurants so he opened up a chop house of his own. Now he is invading the field of literature. He writes a book. Well, why not? Hemingway wrote a book, didn't he? So did Steinbeck. If those bums can write a book, why not Schacht? . . . Read the following pages for the answer.

QUENTIN REYNOLDS

**G I HAD FUN**



# 1. WARMING UP

A BALL PLAYER doesn't stop hugging the plate until he gets hit with the ball, and that's the way it is with war, I guess. It was not until the summer of 1942, some six months after Pearl Harbor, that World War II first affected me personally.

A lot of us knew there was a war going on but we weren't taking it any too seriously. The general feeling was that this was a ball game between the major leagues and a Class D outfit, and that as soon as our side got warmed up, we'd take care of Japan in a couple of months. We had too many starting pitchers, and too many reserves in the dugout, and it was merely a matter of time. I was one of the overconfident on-lookers who thought quite definitely that we would win this one without even getting up a sweat.

I was in the middle of my clowning tour, moving from ball park to ball park, and breaking long jumps by appearing at service camps where they could arrange ball games for me. I was in Norfolk, getting ready for a show at the Naval Air Station, when a lieutenant in the Public Relations Office at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital called me.

"Al," he pleaded, "if you can stop off at the naval hospital here and take a bow at our ball game, you'd be doing us a great favor. How about it?"

Well, I had a day off the following afternoon and since I wasn't far away from Portsmouth, I agreed.

"O.K., Lieutenant," I said casually. "I'll do it, but we'll have to speed it up. I have to make about four hundred miles tomorrow night."

The next afternoon, before about three thousand sailors, I took some falls while the two Portsmouth teams were prac-

ting, gave my impersonation of a conceited pitcher going into the ninth with a three-run lead and winding up under the shower bath "by way of Cape Horn," and was ready to move on. It was only a short show but the boys gave me quite a hand, and when the lieutenant asked me if I would say hello to some of the lads in the wards, I couldn't refuse. But I didn't like the idea.

I was seeing a lot of servicemen in my travels and my appearances at camps, but all those fellows were healthy and robust. Wards meant sick or wounded, and I had never seen the inside of a service hospital. I didn't know what to expect and I was scared just thinking of it. The first ward I came into changed my mind immediately. These boys might have been sick or recovering from sickness, but they were smiling as I was introduced. Some even yelled out, "Hi-ya, Al!"

For an ex-pitcher who was accustomed more to shouts of "Take the bum out," "Hi-ya, Al" sounded good.

I felt funny—just like the time the umpire caught me pitching with a ten-cent "rocket" baseball, with the real ball in the back of my shirt. For some reason or other, I didn't rush out as I had intended. I told some baseball stories, answered a few questions, and before leaving I stopped in front of the bed of one kid who looked a little sicker than the rest.

"How do you feel, sailor?" I asked, unable to think of anything else to say.

"I feel great, Al," he replied, and the biggest grin I ever saw spread over his face.

We kidded each other a while and then, meaning to cheer him up some more, I said, "You'll be out of here in no time. What are you going to do when you get out?"

"Al," he said earnestly, "when I get out I'm going home for a couple of days to see the folks. Then I'm getting right back into action."

This was something new to me. I was stunned. Here was this kid, a wounded veteran of twenty-one who didn't know when he was going to get well, and his main thoughts were

concerned with a brief glimpse of home and then back into action. Up to now, a GI had meant nothing more to me than a nice American boy in an American training camp. Here was my first meeting with another type of GI—the kid I had seen as part of a crowd had become an individual with a personality of his own.

I can't explain the mingled thoughts that passed through my mind at the time. I was supposed to be a big-shot entertainer, doing the boys a favor by visiting them, but instead I felt smaller than Walter Johnson's fast ball must have looked to opposing batters on a cloudy day—and Sir Walter was the fastest of them all. When the lieutenant thanked me for my kindness, I shook his hand and said, "Get in touch with my office, Lieutenant, and we'll arrange to give the boys a real show—if they want me to come back."

That was really the beginning. I still didn't know the answer, but I seemed to find time for more service camps and hospitals, and tried not to turn down any request for an appearance for the boys. I even wrote to Army Special Services to see if I could enlarge my schedule. And when I did a show at a camp or hospital, I looked more closely at the thousands of American boys who were there because somebody else started a fight and they had to finish it.

I wanted to do something to help and even volunteered to return to pitching if that would ease the manpower shortage, but the moment the papers announced my intentions, a serious crisis arose in the lumber industry. Bat factories were swamped with orders from guys fifty and up who were willing to come out of retirement just for another chance to hit against me. It's no wonder that when I gave up pitching for coaching and clowning that the batters in the American League wore mourning bands all season.

It was a letter from a soldier in Newfoundland that gave me my first thoughts of going overseas to entertain. It was a simple, sincere letter and told me that the boys stationed at a

certain American base had chosen me as the guy they would like to have as the guest of honor for their annual banquet.

I never got to that particular base in Newfoundland, but it's remarkable how letters have a way of changing the entire course of your life—my life, anyway. I got into the major leagues by writing letters of praise about myself to Clark Griffith, president of the Washington Senators, but I got the greatest thrill of my life through this letter from Lieutenant Russell Handley, somewhere in Newfoundland. While I couldn't accept his flattering invitation, the letter started the ball that rolled me to North Africa and Sicily, and later to the Southwest Pacific.

The War Department told me politely but bluntly that the trip to Newfoundland was too short for just one show before one group of soldiers. I had to admit it did sound a little silly, now that they mentioned it, but I was beginning to realize what the sailor in the Portsmouth Naval Hospital had in mind about going back into action. It's difficult to tell anybody how you feel, but if you've seen a pitcher who has just been knocked out of the box walking across the field to the clubhouse with his head bowed and his glove dangling from limp fingers, you can understand what I went through. That is one feeling I can speak of with authority.

It was in early July, 1943, that I got my first break. I received a call from Colonel Marvin Young, head of Army Special Services.

"We've been thinking about you, Al," he said, "and we've got a job for you if you'll take it. Would you be willing to go overseas for the War Department?"

He's asking me would I be willing? I was rounding first base before he could say another word.

"When do I go and what do you want me to do?" I asked quickly.

"I can't tell you anything yet, Al," he said, "but we want you to go over as an entertainer. Will you do it?"



They offer me a job and already it's a military secret, but even if I didn't know the details, I was thrilled by the prospects. Would I do it? Of course I would—this was exactly what I'd been hoping for. But even a clown has his serious moments and this was one of them.

There are far better comedians than Al Schacht and much better storytellers, but my type of entertainment is a little different from others, more intimate and with a different background. I was pleased that the War Department even considered me, but if I did go overseas it would have to be to do what I'd been doing for the past thirty years—clowning through baseball.

Perhaps I'm not the greatest judge of human nature and admit to making as many mistakes as any other guy, but I know that when the bases are loaded there are three men on. I could sense even in the American training camps I had visited that the boys' greatest trouble was homesickness. If they were homesick in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, or Camp Dix, New Jersey, how would they feel in the desert of North Africa?

I believed I had an advantage over other entertainers. I talked the language of the average American man and boy—baseball. There wasn't a place I had stopped where I wasn't asked hundreds of baseball questions. Baseball was one way of bringing them closer to home—and that was the most important thing I could offer them.

"I'll go, Colonel," I said, and my mind was made up on this, "but not as part of an act. I'll go alone and do whatever those boys want me to do. I not only want to help entertain them but want to live with them—to bring them closer to home if I can."

I was afraid all the time that Colonel Young planned to send me along with one of the many units that were continually going over and doing such fine work. But I felt that as an entertainer with a unit, I was a right-handed pitcher with a left-handed glove. The GI's didn't want Al Schacht, the clown,

they wanted me as the guy who could talk with them about baseball, which they loved and understood.

"That's exactly what we have in mind for you, Al," the Colonel replied. "We want you to go alone and we know you'll do the best you can."

For the first time in a long while I felt good. I didn't offer any objections when the Colonel told me the trip would require two months of my time, and when he told me there was no hurry and he'd give me a few days to make up my mind, I said, and meant it, "My mind is made up, Colonel. I hope you don't change yours."

He laughed and assured me that he wouldn't.

"Good-by, Al," he said. "We'll contact you as soon as everything is set."

"By the way, Colonel," I inquired, "this isn't important but it's nice to know these things—where am I supposed to go?"

"That," answered Colonel Young calmly, "is something I cannot tell you. In fact, there's nothing I can reveal to you about this. Everything must be a secret in the Army, even with entertainers."

I now knew how the boys in the camps felt but they never even hinted that the feeling was there. They knew they were going somewhere but that was all. If it was good enough for them, it was certainly good enough for me.

The first day I reported to the Washington Senators I was told by our veterans that Clark Griffith never let a pitcher know when he was going to pitch.

"You just have to be ready all the time," they said, "and when 'the fox' wants you to go in there he'll toss you the ball."

As each day passed and I got no word from the War Department, I recalled those days with Griff. The only difference was that this thing was worth waiting for, while in my pitching days it was another story. Almost every time Griff tossed me the ball, I would wind up taking a third-inning shower.

I was beginning to imagine that they'd forgotten all about me when I got a phone call to go and get some "shots." I

knew from talking with other entertainers who had been over that when they started giving you your shots you were about ready to leave.

Everything was still a deep mystery to me, but in addition to filling me full of holes, they also told me what to pack away. I was to include a heavy coat and a light one, the usual necessary underwear, shirts, and toilet articles, and anything else I needed—up to a total of seventy-five pounds. That's quite a lot of weight for a two-month trip.

I don't know how I did it but I managed to squeeze in a New York Yankee uniform, my battered top hat and frock coat, all part of my act, and one oversized baseball glove in addition to a regular pitcher's glove which I had borrowed from manager-outfielder Mel Ott of the New York Giants. That, and a pair of spiked shoes belonging to another Giant player, completed my clowning equipment. It was with regret that I left behind my huge catcher's mitt, which alone weighed about twenty-three pounds, and was a great favorite with the boys as well as a handy air-raid shelter in a pinch.

On Tuesday, July 27, my patience was rewarded. I got a mysterious phone call which told me simply: "You are leaving Wednesday morning at four o'clock. Don't say anything to anybody and be ready. We'll pick you up."

They tell me nothing and then warn me about spreading it.

The Army may keep you in suspense but it certainly keeps its word. At four A.M. sharp, on the morning of Wednesday, July 28, 1943, I was picked up and driven to La Guardia Airport. I still didn't know where I was going but I knew at least I was going to fly.

Of all the forms of travel, I like flying the least, but my thoughts were far away from my fear of heights as we waited to board the Clipper. I was thinking of what I was going to do when I got to where I was going. I was wondering how I would react under the realistic conditions of war and whether I could take it.

I was worrying, too, about how the boys would react to me.

Entertaining them in the United States, their home ground, was one thing, but those kids would now be far away from home and maybe I wouldn't go over so well. My thoughts kept racing from one thing to another, and somehow the word hospital was always jumping in. I hoped I wouldn't have to appear at too many hospitals because hospitals overseas meant more than sick kids—they meant wounded, a lot seriously, and maimed. I had been reading about the marvelous morale of our wounded. I hoped I could live up to their spirit.

The ball game hasn't even started and I'm ready for the showers, as usual.

My first surprise before boarding the Clipper was learning my destination. In a special room I was handed my passport, and in the space reserved for final destination, it read: "Port Lyautey, North Africa."

That's quite a stone's throw from New York City.

For some reason, I had gotten the impression I was headed for London. Port Lyautey was a lot closer to the American battlefields of the time. I was glad.

Standing there, wondering what the future held in store for me, and whether I would make good or not, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was a fellow in a pilot's uniform.

"You're Al Schacht, aren't you?" he said. "And you're going to Port Lyautey, North Africa?"

He asks me and he tells me at the same time.

"How do you know where I'm going?" I inquired politely.

Here I wait for almost three weeks before I learn the facts and this guy tells me before we're even formally introduced.

"How do I know?" he said. "That's easy. I'm Ed Robinson, your pilot."

"Well," I shouted, "what are we waiting for, Captain Robinson? Let's go!"

We didn't leave immediately, but at ten o'clock that morning I found myself on the Clipper. I looked around me and

discovered that my companions were sixteen young Navy men, and a nice-looking woman whom I immediately nicknamed Madame X because I didn't know her name and it sounded more mysterious that way.

The Navy boys, I later learned, had just completed training as a crew and were on a special mission, to see action for the first time. If that was on their minds, they didn't show it once. They were carefree and always laughing or telling stories. They made the trip easy for me, and I forgot I was supposed to be the funny man and listened to them. They were always clowning and playing jokes on each other. After a while they played their jokes on me—these Navy men stick together—but I was glad to be included in. There was no thought of war as we approached Newfoundland, our first stop, and when we tired of talking we played gin rummy.

Sometime in the afternoon we landed in Botwood, Newfoundland, an isolated British base. In the hands of the Navy boys I had completely forgotten to be nervous, and when my feet touched ground again I turned to them and said, "Fellows, you can now call me Al 'Doolittle' Schacht."

A meal had been prepared for us in Botwood, and it was after eating—we were seated around a long table and pretending we were having a formal banquet—that one of the boys got up and declared, "Al Schacht—I now appoint you Mayor of Botwood."

I rose to my feet, looked out the window at this dreary little town, and with no malice to Botwood, said, "Thank you very much. I now resign as Mayor of Botwood."

That's the way these kids were—headed for their first fight and not knowing whether they would come back from it—but instead of worrying, they kept looking for something else to laugh about.

Undoubtedly I was good material for them, especially when we learned that Ireland was to be our next stop. They kidded me mercilessly about my getting into Ireland, and by the time we left Botwood the odds were ten to one that I couldn't get

into Ireland and a hundred to one that if I did get in I couldn't get out.

Can I help it if I look like a Bronx Indian?

Listening to the Navy boys kid me about getting into Ireland reminded me of my playing days when a lot of the ball players were great "dugout jockeys." Riding the opposition was a very popular sport in those days, and many a game was won or lost because some guy could give and take a little better than another. These boys would have made marvelous dugout jockeys.

We were preparing to land in Ireland—the southern tip—and they were still at it.

"The worst they can do to you, Al," one of them said, "is keep you on the Clipper till we're ready to shove off again. We'll let you know what Ireland looks like."

Another one consoled me with the following suggestion:

"When you get to the customs man, say, 'Top o' the mornin' to ye, sirr,' and tell him your name is O'Schacht. That might get you by, if he isn't looking."

I was beginning to believe them and wondered if it wouldn't have been a good idea to have brought a letter of reference from my friends Joe McCarthy of the Yankees, Joe Cronin of the Boston Red Sox, or maybe even Frank Shaughnessy of the International League or Art Flynn of the *Sporting News*—all Irishmen in good standing.

Of course, I got into Ireland, all right. The customs man didn't even give me a second look. After that terrific build-up, it was disappointing to get in so easy, and it was obvious that the name or fame of Schacht had not as yet spread to old Erin.

Our landing place was a town called Foines, and after a brief breakfast served us by four pretty Irish colleens, we were driven some twenty-five miles to Adair. There we were to spend the day at an inn until it was time to travel again. Because of Jerry activity in this sector, we were permitted to fly only at night, and it was around here, they told me, that actor Leslie Howard and his plane were shot down.



At the inn we washed up a bit and I even managed to find time to send postcards to my Irish friends, including McCarthy and Cronin.

"I made Ireland," I boasted. "You never did. Wire me at once if you want me to look up any of your ancestors."

The boys didn't give me much time for relaxation. Either they were restless, or I made a perfect foil for their jokes.

"Come on, Al," they said, "you be our navigator and show us the town."

"I'll go," I said, "if you fellows stop looking at my nose and making me feel like a pointer."

We started out to explore this bit of Ireland, but there was little to see in Adair—the streets were empty and the only noise we heard was our own talking and laughter. We were about to give up when one of the boys spotted a sign which read:

"O'FLAHERTY'S GIN MILL."

Leave it to the Navy to find the most interesting places. I turned to the kid and said, "From now on you're the navigator of this crew. Lead on. This we've got to see."

Our interest, of course, and the Navy boys will vouch for this, was strictly educational. We entered the place, the front part of which was a general store and the rear a pub or bar, and for reasons unexplainable marched directly to the rear. We were greeted by two pretty barmaids.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye, my pretty colleens," I said, just as the boys had taught me, "and if we stick around long enough I'll throw in the shank of the evenin' for good luck. May we have a drink?"

Ireland being a neutral country, everybody was in civilian clothes, and while the boys got by, I don't think I made too much of an impression on the girls. They served us a drink, seemed a bit angry when I kept calling one Mary and the other Eileen, which by a strange coincidence didn't happen to be their names, and were actually frightened when I threatened to marry one of them.

The entrance of Mrs. O'Flaherty, owner of the Gin Mill, saved the girls from further fear, and under the persistent urging of a few of the kids, I proceeded to talk Mrs. O'Flaherty out of a bottle of Jameson's Irish whisky. The good woman had sworn to me only a moment before that such a thing was impossible to get in Ireland, and it was only because she knew these boys were going off somewhere to battle that she was giving it to me.

"You have just talked me out of a bottle of Irish whisky," she declared as if the world had collapsed under her, "and very lucky you are. This is probably the last such bottle in all of Ireland."

We all thanked Mrs O'Flaherty, assuring her that we wouldn't breathe a word of this to anybody and that we wouldn't bother her again until the next time, and back we went to the inn. We agreed not to touch the bottle until we landed in Port Lyautey, but little did we know then of the terrible fate that awaited this innocent bottle on our arrival in North Africa.

When it came time to get out of Ireland, everybody knew I had a bottle of Irish whisky. The boys picked up where they left off.

"You were lucky to get in but you'll never get out of Ireland, especially with that bottle."

They threatened to steal it the minute I wasn't looking and I pretended I was wary by keeping the thing under my coat all the time and sleeping with it under my pillow.

We returned to Foines to board the Clipper again, and by this time the odds were a thousand to one against my getting out, and a million to one against the bottle and me leaving together. One of us, the kids declared with authority, would have to stay, and it would probably be the bottle.

I was the only one surprised when we took off for Port Lyautey and both the bottle and I were aboard the Clipper. The customs man merely raised a curious eyebrow when I reluctantly declared the whisky as one of my possessions and



it saved me the trouble of telling him the great lie one of the kids had thought up for me.

"If the customs guy bothers you, Al," this ingenious kid said, "tell him you were walking down the main street this afternoon when a big wind came up. This was one of the fiercest winds you ever saw and you had all you could do to keep your feet. You were standing there, trying to get a grip on yourself, when all of a sudden out of nowhere a bunch of bottles came rolling down the street carried by this wind. And before you knew it, one of the bottles hit you right in the palm of the hand. You looked at it and imagine your surprise when you saw it was none other than a bottle of Jameson's Irish whisky, this same remarkable bottle you now have in your possession."

If this was a sample of the imaginative powers of the American serviceman, this war was definitely in the bag. And if all the kids I was going to meet in North Africa were like this one, I was certain of one thing—Schacht wouldn't have very many dull moments. I'm going over to entertain them, and they're entertaining me.

## 2. NORTH AFRICA—THE BALL GAME BEGINS

OF all the things I didn't study in school, geography led the league. Oceans, rivers, and lakes were all alike to me—the only water that made any sense to me was the hot and cold running variety—and as for the different lands, the only land that mattered was that around the home plate when I was pitching.

But that is all part of the past. Right now, Chris Columbus had nothing on me. I had already been in Newfoundland and Ireland, had completed the crossing of an ocean, and here I was about to land in North Africa.

North Africa—up to now those words meant nothing more than the place from which Frank Buck “brought ’em back alive,” and the home of a very popular game called African galloping dominoes. It was a little different now, of course. It was the battlefield on which the Allies had recently won the pennant and had taken off for the World Series, and it was the place where Al Schacht had to stop having so much fun and get down to the business of entertaining the GI—if he could.

I got my first glimpse of Port Lyautey, and North Africa, at seven-thirty in the morning. It looked just as I always thought it would look—like a big desert, Coney Island with more sand and lots of Arabs. Port Lyautey, I learned, was mostly an antisubmarine base with PBY's taking off from there to patrol the Mediterranean as far as Gibraltar looking for Nazi subs. They got quite a few, too.

A Lieutenant Jack Lafferty greeted me as I stepped off the Clipper, and as if I were a long-lost friend he shook my hand eagerly. It's a nice feeling to have when you're

thousands of miles from home—the feeling that you are among friends—and that's the way I found it everywhere.

I got the first feeling of how the boys lived when the lieutenant checked me into a cot in a hut. It was a long, narrow, but very neat hut, with two rows of iron cots—about fifty—and here I was to stay until I was taken to Casablanca for my first scheduled show.

Everything moves on schedule with the services, and I'd hardly tossed my stuff into the hut when the lieutenant said, "Now, Al, we've got to go and meet the doctor."

"Let's go," I said, "but why do I have to meet the doctor?"

"To get some more shots," answered Lafferty.

"Here we go again," I said weakly, feeling like a retreaded tire about to be punctured again.

North Africa, Lafferty told me, trying to ease the pain, was a place where you might catch anything—that's why you had to have the shots. I made up my mind then and there I wasn't going to take any chances. I would take all the shots they could give me.

The medical headquarters was in a regular brick building, taken over from the French. I wasn't in there more than a few minutes and had just stripped to the waist for the shots, when a group of Navy boys rushed in. They'd heard I was in. From then on, I was bombarded with questions.

"How's everything in New York, Al?"

"Have you been in Pittsburgh lately?"

"How are the women back home—still good-looking?"

"Who's going to win the pennant?"

"How do the bums look?"

The questions came so fast I couldn't answer them all but they were satisfied just to hear about home. Any part of the United States spelled home to these sailors, a lot of whom hadn't seen an American port for many months.

When they ran out of questions, they started to work on me.

"We'll take care of you," they said.

It wasn't the doctor who gave me the shots—the sailors took charge of that. They had been trained, of course, but they pretended they didn't know a thing about it, and as one held my arm, another would make believe he couldn't find the right spot and would move the needle all over my arm before making contact. I took some three shots in all, as I recall, but the way they fought kiddingly as to who would have the privilege of giving me the next one, you'd think my arm was being amputated.

"Hey, fellows," I yelled above the noise. "If any of you find my curve ball while you're fiddling with that arm, let me know. There's a shortage of pitchers."

The shots completed, they gave me a couple of pills. First they fill me full of holes, now they start to fill me full of pills. I stood up, flexed my muscles and shouted for all to hear.

"If any of you guys got any more pills on you, I'd like to have them. I don't want to miss a thing."

They laughed and bunched around me, slapping me on the back, and I knew right there that what they wanted was not only entertainment—they did a pretty good job of entertaining themselves—but much more the companionship of someone in touch with things at home. During my brief stay in Port Lyautey, I heard only one gripe.

"It's not bad here, Al," they confided to me, "but it's too quiet, not enough action. We'd like to go where the fighting is."

This, I learned, was typical of the GI's stationed at the comparatively inactive places. They didn't want the easy job, they wanted to get into the fight. Despite that feeling, never once did I see a man shirk at any job he had.

I wasn't supposed to do any shows in Port Lyautey—there weren't enough men stationed there—but they arranged a ball game for me and made me go through some of my baseball stunts. I borrowed a pair of binoculars from one of the Navy men and put on what I call my "nearsighted pitcher." Even with binoculars, this pitcher couldn't read the catcher's sig-

nals, and he would crawl from the pitcher's box to the home plate on his hands and knees, always peering for the signal he couldn't see. The boys loved it, but made sure I returned the binoculars.

Port Lyautey was also a repair base and I watched the boys at work. They sang all the time, and even though they didn't like the soft job they had they certainly didn't show it.

I ate my first meal in a mess hall and discovered that it was like a big boardinghouse. It was every man for himself.

"Pass me the potatoes?" I asked one kid.

"Grab it yourself," he yelled back laughingly.

The food here was excellent, and partly because of that and the fact that these kids all had marvelous appetites, if you came late for a meal you were out of luck.

That night, after dinner, Lafferty came to my hut.

"Al," he said, "I'm going to take you to Hut Number Two, the best and only place in Port Lyautey. Not everybody gets in, because there is only room for just so many, so you can call yourself lucky."

He took me to this hut, where I found about twenty or thirty of the boys gabbing away and drinking wine. They gave me a glass of wine and to me, practically freshly arrived from the comforts of New York, it tasted awful.

"Fellows," I said, "I appreciate your kindness but this wine is lousy. Now, I have a bottle of Jameson's Irish whisky in my room and if anyone of you would like a sip, just speak up."

The noise that followed is hard to describe. The boys almost knocked me down in the rush to get close.

"What are you waiting for?" they almost screamed. "Where's the bottle?"

In fear for my life, I went and got the bottle. I handed it to Lafferty and from then on the whereabouts of the bottle was a deep mystery to me. About three minutes later, or even quicker than that, they gave the bottle back, and only one word is necessary to describe its condition—empty.



the conditions at Port Lyautey were far from those in places closer to the war front, these men, too, had a job to do. And here I was, living with them, eating in the same mess hall and sleeping in the same hut. I didn't sleep too well my first night but didn't mind it at all the next morning at five-thirty when I got to the mess tent for breakfast and was greeted with shouts of "Hi, buddy, how're you today?"

I was one of them.

As we gathered in line in front of the big "ash cans" full of cereal, they kidded me about the show I had put on at the ball game the day before and it seemed as though we had known each other for years. They must have known me quite well, it appears, because the remarks went something like this:

"Gee, Al, you must have been a broken-down pitcher in your day."

"Did you ever get anybody out?"

"Is it true you used to pray before each pitch?"

Well, at least they gave me the benefit of the doubt and called me a pitcher.

Shortly after breakfast, I was told that my stay in Port Lyautey was practically finished, and that a Special Service man was here to take me to Casablanca. The Special Service man turned out to be my old friend Captain Sidney Piermont, now a major, and in civilian life head of the New York booking office for Loew's Theatres.

"Can't I," I said, "leave New York without having you ten-per-cent agents following me around?"

We had a good laugh and off we went in a jeep for Casablanca.

The ride to Casablanca, about sixty miles from Port Lyautey along the coast, was my first experience in jeep riding. Our driver was a young corporal who'd been overseas nine months. He had been wounded and was now on limited service.

"I came over here to be a soldier and fight," was his only complaint, "and here I am a chauffeur."

But he was far from bitter and he explained the sights to us as we drove along. It was a regular sight-seeing tour.

As we entered the narrow streets of Casablanca I began to see more and more American soldiers. They walked in bunches of four or five, always talking and laughing, some eating pieces of fruit, some singing, harmoniously or otherwise. It all sounded good to my ears.

The boys came to Casablanca on furlough or on short passes and then thumbed rides back on some of the many trucks loaded with supplies that were always rumbling through the town. The Americans, it seemed, were also always looking for something to buy and had the reputation among the natives of being suckers for souvenirs to send home or carry with them. The GI would pay anything they asked for such things as silver trinkets, necklaces, or Arab leather goods, and then start trading with each other when they got back to camp. I don't recall meeting five boys who didn't own a handmade Moroccan wallet.

It was a common thing around here to hear continuous yells of "Hey, buddy." It was an American recognizing a friend or a boy from his home town. They were always looking for somebody from their home town.

It was in Casablanca that I got my first idea of how the American Army lived while awaiting the call for action. The camp was in the desert, just outside of town. Row upon row of tents were pitched in orderly fashion to house the GI's, and it was typical of the American camp that everything was simple but neat. It was here also that I learned the GI reaction to the food.

"The food," they told me, "is as good as the mess sergeant. If you've got a good mess sergeant, the food tastes great. If he's no good, no matter what he cooks, it's lousy."

It was obvious the mess sergeant could be the most popular guy in camp, or vice versa.

The kitchens in these camps, which might have to break up at a moment's notice, were open with a big canvas cover.



When it was time to eat, the soldiers would line up, each with his own tin plate and a cup for tea or coffee, and it was everybody for himself. There was no pushing, but if a guy got out of line or tried to sneak up ahead of another, he was a marked man.

I stood in line with them and marveled at the way they just held their plates up and the food was tossed into it. The mess sergeant's assistants never missed the plate, and the GI at the receiving end never missed holding onto it. What a baseball battery they would have made if they could play ball like that—and a lot of them could. After eating they had to clean their own dishes, and this they would do by dipping them into a can of hot water.

While I ate with the boys whenever I got the chance in Casablanca, I had been checked into a hotel in the city, and it was there that I met my first Arab.

"Wait until you see the Arabs," the sailors in Port Lyautey had warned me, and the first one I did see turned out to be the elevator operator in the hotel.

It took me almost ten minutes to get to my room on the third floor, not only because the elevator was a slow one, but also because the only language the Arab and I could agree on was my pointing upward with my finger. Every time I pointed, he'd go up another floor. It was getting a little monotonous but he finally made it. When I got to my room I wondered why I had taken so much trouble to go up.

I opened the window and, after one quick look and an even quicker whiff of the air, closed it immediately. There was an Arab market almost directly beneath the window and the odor it gave off didn't exactly smell like the aroma of Evening in Paris.

"This is one room," I said to myself, "where it looks like I'm sleeping with the windows closed."

I mention this incident only because now it keeps popping into my mind, but in Casablanca I forgot it right after it

happened—I didn't give it a second thought and certainly not even a second smell.

My first job was ahead of me, the hospital in the desert off Casablanca, and I learned it was a big hospital. The patients, they told me, were soldiers who'd been wounded in the battle at Cassarene Pass, and quite a few from the Sicilian fronts. When I asked one veteran in Casablanca what happened at Cassarene Pass, he didn't give me much information.

"That was a great show," he declared, "and they knocked the bejesus out of us."

Whether they won or lost a fight, everything was a great show to these fellows, and I noticed their positive unwillingness to talk about the battles they'd been in.

As we drove out to the hospital, a distance of about fifty miles in the desert, I kept thinking about the naval hospital in Portsmouth. There I had seen mostly sick kids. What would it be in Casablanca?

### 3. LAUGHING GAS FOR THE WOUNDED

I NOW know what they mean by the expression "funny as a crutch."

They said that about a comedian who went into a service hospital, looked around him at the sick and wounded, and remarked: "I know you fellows feel lousy, so I'll tell you some jokes."

It's a little difficult to walk into a hospital and try to be funny, especially when you don't know what to expect nor what is expected of you. But they had me scheduled here, and tough as it seemed to me, I was determined to do the best I could. For Casablanca was really my testing ground, and all I had was a formula that my earlier experience had taught me. I made up my mind to treat these boys not as sick people but as fellows looking for a little fun and a touch of home. I was sure they weren't after sympathy, and certainly they didn't want to hear any of my old jokes.

Yet it was with a feeling of terror that I walked into the 69th Station Hospital in the desert on August 4. It didn't remain long, for the first thing that greeted me was a big colored poster on a bulletin board.

AL SCHACHT, THE CLOWN PRINCE OF BASEBALL, HERE TODAY.  
DON'T MISS THE SHOW.

These kids were wounded and sick—where else could they go?

Then there was a remarkable cartoon likeness of me, dressed in an Arab costume, and spotted here and there some of the crazy poses I sometimes adopt on a ball field, like catching a ball sitting down, and kneeling in prayer on the pitcher's mound before a pitch.

The artist's name in the left-hand bottom corner told me a J. B. Murphy, a seaman in the United States Merchant Marine, had done the work. The only Murphy I knew was still pitching for the Yankees when I left New York, so it couldn't be him.

I made up my mind to look this Murphy fellow up, and did later, learning that he had drawn this picture from a description of me given him by someone who knew me.

"I'm supposed to be a funny man," I thought to myself, "but these kids have the sense of humor. And what talent!"

Jim Murphy knew everything about baseball, and it was my talk with him that really gave me the idea for the bull sessions in the wards and after the stage shows. I made him autograph the poster to me, and it is one of my prized possessions.

The master of ceremonies for the show in this hospital turned out to be Dr. David L. Mandell, a friend of long standing and now a captain in the Medical Corps. He took me in hand and made things much easier for me.

"Al," he said, "we've got a little stage back here. We've got quite a number of patients and those who can get out of bed are going to gather around the stage, and those that can't get out, you can visit in the wards, if you don't mind."

Before I went on, one of the boys handed me an Arab outfit.

"That'll make you feel at home here, Al," he declared. "And the boys will get quite a kick out of it."

Now I am an Arab.

I'm accustomed to getting out on a ball field with as many as seventy thousand persons looking on and doing my pantomime acts without feeling a bit nervous. If the crowd didn't like the act, they still had a ball game to follow and the ball game was more important than Schacht. But here it was a little different. I was supposed to be the attraction, and as I looked around from the little stage, scanning the faces about me, those faces had that certain look.

"Go ahead, you bum," they seemed to say. "Make us laugh."

The captain introduced me and I was on my own.

"I'm here to entertain you fellows," I said, "and I'll do the best I can. After all, I won the First World War and I know how you fellows feel. When I was drafted in 1918, our side was losing. When they gave me my discharge, our side had won. That proves I had something to do with it. So as one veteran to another, let your hair down and we'll have some fun."

They laughed and one boy yelled out, "What did you do in the last war, Al?"

"I was a secret weapon," I answered. "They hid me in a hospital at Fort Slocum. I won the Battle of Influenza."

The gag worked. They were warmed up by now and the strain was off.

"I'll do a few acts for you," I announced, "and then if you can stand it I'll try to answer any questions you want to ask me, but please, fellows, don't ask me what kind of a pitcher I was."

One of my best pantomime performances is the "conceited pitcher" and I do it so well because it probably happened to me a few hundred times during my pitching career. I put that on for the boys, going into the game with the bases empty, filling the bases, and then dragging myself out of the box by the scruff of my neck as the clean-up man hit a home run to score four runs. The whole thing is in pantomime, of course, but they didn't miss a thing and they roared every time I got another man on base.

Then I gave them my piano recital, in which I play a Hungarian rhapsody, Symphony in C minor, and *Madame Butterfly*, all at the same time. I play piano by ear only, and have a bad ear, but the boys didn't know until I missed the end keys and flopped off the stool flat on my face that I was kidding all the time. Luckily the few notes I hit seem to sound like music.

Right after that, they started pounding me with questions. Some were silly and some very clever but they ran to one trend—how were things at home? They would ask me about baseball players and the Army and they showed no resentment against any not in uniform. They were surprised when I told them that a great number of our big-name ball players were already in the services.

It was tougher in the wards, where I noticed quite a few surgical cases. There were about fifty boys in each ward, with the beds lined up against the walls. Captain Mandell introduced me in a matter-of-fact way, and I took over.

"Fellows," I said, "I'm going to do the best I can to entertain you. I can't do a regular show here. I know you've missed your baseball and I'm supposed to be a baseball man, so if there are any questions you want to ask me about baseball I'll be glad to answer them, if I can. Let your hair down and let's have a lot of fun."

It took these kids a little longer to get warmed up, but when they did there was no stopping them. Nine out of ten times they'd give me an argument, especially when it came to talking about averages. They asked everything and answered it themselves, but were particularly sharp on averages.

When I was pitching, I didn't have to worry about averages. No matter how high or low a batter's average was, they were always hitting at least .700 or better against me. I have yet to meet a batter who didn't start a conversation with me by saying, "Remember that triple I hit against you, Al? . . ."

Nobody ever got singles or doubles against me, it seems, only triples and home runs, and I am still searching for the guy who'll admit I ever got him out. What's more, they didn't even bother to compute my batting averages, and as for my pitching statistics, let's just skip that completely.

But the boys, I discovered, liked to talk about averages, and I didn't stop them. They asked me about the averages of former and present stars and when I couldn't tell them, they told me.

"If you guys know all the answers," I shouted, "what the hell are you asking me for?"

They just laughed and continued the quiz, and before they knew it, they ran the show and I was the innocent bystander. My worries about the morale of our wounded and how to act before them were ended. Not once was there a spoken indication that this was a hospital for wounded. If all the hospitals I was to visit, I thought, were like this one, my job was easy.

The show at this hospital was in the morning, and about three o'clock that afternoon I put on a show at a ball game in a rest camp. This was the first rest camp I had seen and there were some ten thousand soldiers there, most of them veterans of a number of campaigns. They were there to relax and play, and they did a lot of both.

I sometimes think there must be a little of what they call "ham" in me, because the bigger the crowd the better I work—or maybe it's because there's safety in numbers. If somebody in a big crowd doesn't like what I'm doing and threatens to beat me up, there'll always be somebody else who feels sorry enough for me to stop him.

Anyway, I went through my entire baseball routine for the boys, and after the ball game, did a stage show for them from the back of a truck. From there I went back into Casablanca and that night did a show in a big shed, or warehouse, with a group of Navy men just off the ships as my audience. I loved it and I think they did, too.

By that time I was really tired, and I went back to the hotel certain that even the Arabian aroma wouldn't keep me from sleeping. I stopped at the bar and drank some wine. They had wine of all colors and none of it was any good, but I drank the wine, pretending each glass was a dry Martini, and I began to like the wine.

The last show I did before leaving Casablanca for Oran was on the outskirts of town with an audience composed mostly of Italian prisoners. I never saw so many prisoners



before, and as I went through my antics they watched me from the roofs where they were quartered. I know they didn't understand what I was doing and probably thought I was nuts, but believe me, not one of them walked out on my act. They couldn't!

My job had just begun but the GI's—those in the camps and those in the hospitals—had made it easy for me. They turned out to be the best audience I ever had the privilege to work for, and I knew what I had to do and what I was going to do from there on. I had a definite picture of the GI now, for I had seen him at work and at play, had eaten with him and slept in the same sleeping quarters. I had also become a bit intimate with the wounded and the sick and I was happy that they accepted me as a "buddy" and not as an entertainer here to cheer them up.

While in Casablanca I also became a very important international figure, an honor I probably share with every soldier and sailor who set foot in Casablanca. Colonel "Dutch" Meyers, whom I had met in town, arranged to take me to the villa where Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt had lunched. The Colonel, former football coach at Texas Christian, all-around athlete and baseball umpire, assured me that the trip was worth while.

"Al, you'll love it," he said. "You'll even sit in the same seat the President sat in."

"Isn't that too hot a seat?" I inquired politely.

We got there and it was a beautiful place. I made a mental note, after sitting in the same chair the President had sat in, to wire the President that he had dropped his handkerchief under the seat—although I didn't think he would believe me.

My stay in Casablanca was over and I got word right after my last show that I was going to fly the next morning rain or shine. I almost hated to leave but I think Captain Piermont was happy about the whole thing. I understand he checked into a rest camp the moment I departed.



## 4. BASE HITS IN ORAN

IT was a three-hour flight from Casablanca to Oran, three hours closer to the fighting fronts in Sicily. Casablanca and Port Lyautey are ports on the North Atlantic—Oran is on the Mediterranean.

From the air you could see the movement of hundreds of ships, big ones and little ones, and you realized that a lot of them might be full of soldiers—soldiers you may only recently have entertained—headed possibly for Palermo, Salerno, or Catania, where the fighting was thick.

We landed at the airport about nine in the morning, and I learned immediately how those GI's feel when they recognize a buddy. The first voice I heard as I stepped off the plane was none other than the booming basso of Zeke Bonura, former first baseman for the Chicago White Sox, New York Giants, and Washington Senators, and a great friend of mine.

Zeke, it developed, was an Army corporal in charge of recreation in Oran and vicinity.

"Boy, oh, boy, oh, boy, Al Schacht!" he shouted. "Am I glad to see you—and have I got it worked out for you!"

I wouldn't doubt that. Zeke may not have been the greatest of ball players, but he could hit with the best of them, and was always the liveliest guy on the field. He was also one of the funniest fellows in any league, always clowning. His father owns a banana plantation in New Orleans and everybody called Zeke "Bananas." You could never tell whether Zeke was serious or kidding.

"So you've got things all worked out for me," I said. "I suppose you're going to manage me over here. Do I work this morning?"

"Don't be impatient, Al," replied the obliging Zeke. "Of course you work. Come on, we've got to go—let's go!"

With that he took out a tremendous watch, which I discovered later he had gotten in a trade with a German prisoner. He looked at this watch and, without as much as blinking an eye, announced, "We're leaving in twenty minutes."

"Where am I leaving for in twenty minutes, Zeke?" I inquired.

"For a hospital," he said.

"Where is this hospital?" I asked.

"In the mountains," he answered.

Up to this time, I have not seen any mountains—nothing but water and sand.

"What mountains are you talking about?"

"What's the difference?" replied Zeke, and that was that.

Zeke never let me in on where we were going and I stopped asking after a while. What difference did it make so long as he got me to where I was supposed to go, where those boys knew in advance that I was coming to put on a show? The biggest crime an entertainer could commit was not showing up for a scheduled affair. For a stage show the boys traveled from all parts of the desert, and it didn't matter if you went on to lay a million eggs as long as you showed up.

The ride to this hospital in the mountains is one I'll never forget. We were taken there in two cub planes, single seaters. Zeke crouched behind his pilot and I behind mine. I finally saw mountains but no visible place to land, and I was beginning to feel a little nervous when we landed right by a Red Cross sign made out of rocks. From the air, that strip didn't look two feet long. My respect for the Army Air Corps grew tremendously and I made a promise never to fret when in their hands. Even on short hops, you could see that these boys were great fliers.

I have seen a lot of strange things, but this hospital in the mountains was one of the most wonderful and amazing sights I have ever seen. This place was not only a hospital

but a water cure for the wounded boys—a sort of Hot Springs in Oran. This had been a health resort before the war and now its benefits were being used for our men. The hot sulphur water that came out of the mountains was a great healer, they told me. With the attention our wounded got, no wonder most of them wind up as good as new.

I looked around me and there were these wounded kids waving to me as if I was a long-lost friend. I waved right back and as they gathered round, most of them coming right from the water where they had been soaking in the sulphur, I knew that my show here would be a cinch. How could I miss under such friendly, homey conditions?

With Zeke as master of ceremonies, and a lot funnier than I was, we had an informal show. I went through my usual baseball pantomimes and after that it was one question after the other. Wounds, I discovered more and more, were minor things to these boys. Their greatest sickness was homesickness, and they felt it more than the boys in the camp because here they had less activity to keep their minds off it. But they were in great spirits when Zeke and I left them. They had been given a touch of home and that would last them a long time. These kids didn't ask for much.

As I stood before wounded soldiers in the wards, I rarely knew what was wrong with them. They were comfortably propped up in bed with a sheet covering their entire bodies up to the neck, and unless you were told by the doctor you couldn't guess that some were missing an arm, or others a leg. Certainly they never mentioned it, and what's more never left you with the impression that they were even hurt.

I wasn't surprised at any of the questions they asked me and it was in one of these wards that a nice-looking kid with whom I'd been discussing baseball suddenly asked me, "Al, do short fellows make good shortstops?"

He seemed quite serious and it was not a bad question. There are many people who think that size means everything in sports.

"Sure," I answered. "Size has nothing to do with it. We had some great little fellows playing shortstop—guys like Donie Bush, Rabbit Maranville, Phil Rizzuto, Dick Bartell . . ."

"Well," he said, "I ought to make a great shortstop."

"Have you ever played baseball?" I asked.

"I used to play in high school before I got into the Army," he declared.

"Do you like baseball?"

"I love it," he answered.

"That's fine," I said. "When you get back to the States and take up the game again, look me up. I'll see that you get a tryout with one of the big-league clubs."

With that I wished him good luck and walked out. The boy was smiling when I left him.

Outside the ward the major in charge stopped me.

"I couldn't help listening in on that conversation, Al," he said apologetically. "Do you know why that kid asked you about short fellows making good shortstops?"

"Why, no," I replied. "Did you ever see him play ball?"

"No, I never saw him play ball," said the major. "And I'm afraid he'll never play ball again, either. We were forced to amputate both his legs only three weeks ago."

I can't describe my feelings at the moment. Here was this boy, both his legs missing, and he's kidding me about making a good shortstop. With a spirit like that, how could we lose this war?

Oran proved to be quite a busy place. We checked into a hotel about three blocks from the docks and I could see all the activity. Ships were always coming in or going out. Soldiers were always loading and unloading. I got a tremendous kick out of watching the American boys, some of whom had probably never done that kind of work before, assembling jeeps and trucks from the parts taken off the ships, and watching other GI's drive them away to all parts of the desert. Everybody was working, even the Arabs. You began to won-

der where all this material was coming from, and knew, of course, that it must have come from home. It was very inspiring.

Zeke completed my impression of the importance of Oran to the war effort while we were washing up in my room, a foyer with a bed in it.

"Al, we may get some fireworks tonight," he said pleasantly.

"What do you mean by fireworks?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "there was a reconnaissance plane up this morning, I understand, and we've got hundreds of ships in port. Usually, when we have that many ships in port, the Jerries pay us a little visit and drop a few eggs."

"How is their control?" I inquired, speaking as one ball player to another.

"Lousy," said Zeke.

"Then what the hell should I worry about?" I snapped. "After all the line drives I've ducked as a pitcher, what's a few eggs more or less? Anyway, my friend, I don't have to come all the way over here to look at fireworks. I can see all I want at Coney Island—for a dime."

At about two o'clock that afternoon, I put on my first stage show in Oran in a regular theater taken over by the Red Cross. There were about three thousand soldiers there, most of them in on a couple of hours' leave from camp, and what an audience they made. Perhaps it was the presence of Bonura on the stage—everybody loved Zeke and relaxed in his company—but they were the cockiest bunch of soldiers I had yet come across.

After doing a pitching routine, I decided to do one of the things I use at banquets.

"Fellows," I said, "I know you all like to hear about successful men, so I'll tell you the story of my life."

They laughed and whistled.

"I was born . . ." I began.

"No kidding!" yelled out one GI.

"I was born very homely," I continued, and that started another uproar.

While this was going on I picked out one fellow from the audience who seemed to be laughing more than anybody else.

"You," I shouted to him, "stand up and take a bow."

He stood up and took a bow. These boys worked right with you.

"Boys," I said, "here is the homeliest soldier in North Africa."

Everybody razzed him—but it was good clean fun and nobody ever got hurt. These kids could take a joke and give one. Shows that were scheduled for a half-hour or an hour usually stretched into two hours. Nobody complained.

Shortly after the show in the theater, a jeep called for me and took me to another hospital. I was hardened to hospitals now and simplified my routine as I went along. The kids were crazy about baseball.

"How are the Boston Red Sox doing, Al?" a boy from Boston would ask, and another kid from Chicago would ask about the Cubs or White Sox. Then there was always somebody from Brooklyn, and he'd pipe up about the Dodgers. And it was like a cue. One of the other kids would say to the Dodger rooter, "Are you from Brooklyn? Boy, what a lousy ball club they havel"

Before you knew it, they were all in a heated argument and didn't even know I was there. Everybody had a heck of a time.

When the runs, hits, and errors of this war are totaled up, and they look around for unsung heroes of the ball game, I'm sure they'll pin a medal on the broad chest of Zeke Bonura. What he has done for the morale of the American soldier can never be fully revealed except by the GI himself.

Zeke organized an amazing recreation system in and around Oran. He had leagues playing ball everywhere, and when it wasn't hard ball, because of ground conditions or a lack of

baseballs, it was soft ball. Athletic facilities around here were not too good but they made the best of them.

The soldiers' work day started about seven in the morning and they finished around five. Their job, when they weren't fighting, was to see that the ships were loaded and unloaded; that everything was kept moving toward the front. And when they finished work, they played ball or relaxed at some other game. It was a common sight to see a group of soldiers playing cards in a tent.

I spent ten days in these parts and saw a lot of things here that I hadn't noticed in Casablanca. Many of the GI's stationed in the desert camps around Oran were boys freshly in from the States. Some had returned from the action in Sicily, and others had come in from England. You couldn't tell the difference between the veterans and the rookies. They all had that same cocky spirit and they all wanted something to say in a gathering.

If you asked a GI who'd just come in from Sicily about what happened there, his answer stopped you from asking any more questions like that.

"Well," he would say, "I saw Sicily. I'm now ready for Italy."

Nothing at all about the fight.

It was never "if I come back," but "when I come back." They had confidence in their own ability and didn't worry about what else might happen.

You knew there were American boys around as you approached a camp. "Ten miles to Broadway and 42nd Street," a sign would say, or maybe it would be to Michigan Boulevard or Main Street.

When you got to camp there were signs all over the place, and no matter what they said, and I never saw an indecent one, they were never removed. They were typical of the American sense of humor, and read along these lines:

"If You Don't Like This, Go Home."

"Home Was Never Like This."



"This Place Stinks."

"Lights Out—Keep Out of My Pocket."

"The Show Must Go On."

And you knew a camp had been given its shipping orders when you saw signs like these:

"Moving Today—Apartment to Let Tomorrow."

"Evacuating for the Arabs."

There were "Buy Bonds" signs everywhere, but the sign that gave me the greatest thrill, and one I saw in different versions at almost every camp I visited in North Africa, was:

"Don't Waste Food—Remember the Folks Back Home Are Rationed."

These boys are fighting for us, and they're worrying about the home front having enough to eat.

Home was first and last in their minds. Everywhere you went you could see boys sitting under dim lamps in their tents writing letters home before retiring. I saw my first mail delivery in Oran and watched the boys' faces as they waited for their names to be called. The sad, hurt look on the faces of those that didn't receive any mail is something I'd rather forget. They might get ten letters in the next delivery, but at the time they didn't get any it was tragic.

Everybody kept a sharp lookout for those who received packages. Packages, most of the time, meant something to eat, and the boys were always hungry, especially when they could nibble on something that spelled home. Quite often I would see soldiers go to their tents after a meal and pull out some hidden cookies from home for dessert.

But there was too much to do for homesickness to really get them down. A few, of course, cracked under the strain of being away from home for the first time, but most of them took it for granted that the less they griped about it, the quicker they'd get back. They had too much sense and too much humor to let it get them.

I noticed that the boys were always slicking up as if they were going somewhere or something was going to happen. It



couldn't be that they had inspection every day in these camps in the desert, and finally I had to ask one GI about it.

"What are you dressing up for all the time?" I asked this guy, and his answer was simple but to the point.

"You know how it is, Al," he declared. "After all, we never know when we're going to meet a girl."

He was a single man.

There were very few women in those parts and most of them there were Arab women. The others were French and the boys might have done a lot better with them if they had been able to talk French.

One of the last shows I did around Oran was at the 51st General Hospital, at Tafi Rue, in the desert. Bonura had arranged a hard-ball game as the background for my performance, and the narrow ball field right next to the hospital was jammed with GI's. A lot of them were in wheel chairs, wearing dressing gowns instead of uniforms, and when they're not in uniform, there's no telling the officers from the enlisted personnel.

They were practically on top of me, wheel chairs and all, when I started my show. I don't know why I chose this particular routine in so narrow a space, but I got a kid by the name of Jimmy Johnston, from Charleston, South Carolina, to stooge for me in a pitcher-catcher comedy—and it's a good thing our control was good that day or we would have beaned at least a dozen of the boys.

The pitcher-catcher stunt is a warm-up for my feature routines from the pitcher's mound, like the conceited or near-sighted pitcher. It starts normally enough, with me as the pitcher, naturally, throwing an easy one up to the plate. The catcher throws it back a little harder and I wince and stare at him, my hands on my hips. I guess I must look awfully silly at that, with the battered stovepipe hat and the worn frock coat with the red lapels over my Yankee uniform.

I get back to the box after taking that hard throw, wind up and throw a harder one. The catcher throws it back even

harder and you can almost see the pain go through my arm. I stop everything at this moment, whistle loudly, and a kid comes running out with my oversize pitcher's glove, which I immediately put on in place of the regulation mitt.

Each exchange of throws seems to get hotter and tougher to handle, and with each throw I'm moving up on the catcher and he's moving back. I'm inching in all the time, making him step back faster, and finally I'm so close to him he starts running and I'm chasing him. I wind up by cornering him in front of the backstop and throwing my glove at him. It always goes over good with a baseball audience and there was none better than these GI's.

On this occasion the soldiers were always in the way while we were throwing, and it's a good thing for the soldiers that I lost my fast ball thirty years ago. Jimmy Johnston didn't have any trouble catching me. One soldier in a wheel chair always seemed to be in the way, and as I kept yelling at the others to get back, I shouted to this guy:

"Get your big dogs out of the way, soldier!"

When I wasn't pushing him back, the other GI's were doing it for me. You can imagine my embarrassment after the show when I learned that the GI with the "big dogs" was Colonel Miller, the highest-ranking officer on the field. We had quite a laugh over it.

Before leaving Oran I was introduced to one of the wonders of the town by Bonura and a boy from Peoria, Illinois. I knew he was from Peoria because from the moment he got behind the wheel of the jeep he started to compare the scenery of Oran with that of his home town.

"They've got better than this in Peoria," he would say, pointing to various things along the road.

He finally got us to a hill overlooking the port where there was a big castle, and we started to descend the hill when suddenly he stopped the jeep—but it didn't stop. All by itself, it started to go *uphill*. Frankly, I was scared to death—the hill was very steep. I jumped out of the jeep and started to

walk downhill. I couldn't. Every step I took seemed to be dragged down by leaden weights. I reversed myself and almost flew uphill. To this day, I don't know what was behind this natural wonder. These Americans find everything.

It was time to move on. My parting with the lovable Bonura was a touching scene. He kept putting his arms around me and saying, "Gee, Al—I hate to see you go."

I thought for a while he was going to cry, so I slapped him on the back and cheerfully said, "Oh, we'll be back in the States before you know it, Zeke, old boy. Don't worry about a thing."

"I'm not worried about that, Al," he said without changing expression. "I'm just disappointed, that's all. All the time I wanted to see how you would act during an air raid—and we don't get any fireworks."

"You big lug!" I yelled. "So that's what you've been waiting for. Well, I would have done the same as you—ducked under the nearest bed."

Of course, he was kidding—I hope.

Zeke accompanied me to the airport where I was to catch a plane for Algiers and he was by far the most popular guy in Oran. They may have cheered me after a show but it was Zeke they recognized as we rode along in the jeep. It seemed everybody was shouting, "Hey, Zeke!"

Bonura was a GI—and as we sometimes call a ball player "a ball players' ball player," then Zeke could easily be called "the GI's GI."

## 5. ASSISTS IN ALGIERS

ALGIERS is about three hundred miles along the coast from Oran and even without Hedy Lamarr, it looked good to me. The job I had faced with fears and doubts I now thoroughly enjoyed and looked forward to.

Algiers was also the Allied headquarters at the time and that meant more activity. Here was the place where they did the advance thinking for the battles to come, and the soldiers I was to entertain in and around Algiers were soldiers who would shortly afterward be making that trip across the Mediterranean to Sicily.

I was checked into the Alletti Hotel, right off the harbor, but I had given up worrying about my hotel accommodations. Most of my time was spent in traveling from camp to camp and hospital to hospital, and I did most of my sleeping and eating with the GI's.

These GI's may have been a lot closer to the fighting than the bunch I had visited before, but they were just as care-free and just as funny. Shortly after arriving, I did a show from the back of a truck in a rest camp. This camp was right off the water, where they could swim, and they even asked me to join them in a dip. However, I politely refused. I had made the mistake of accepting such an invitation in Arzu, outside of Oran, and wound up having myself saved from drowning by a young sailor. The moment my nose fills up with water—and that's quite a tankful—I sink.

After the show, I had lunch with the boys. It was a lunch of canned sausage. Later, strolling down the beach, I heard somebody shout, "Get your hot sausages here!"

A kid from Brooklyn had opened a sausage stand, using

bread instead of rolls. Coney Island on the Mediterranean—anything to feel at home.

I worked on a time schedule my first day in Algiers and since I was scheduled for six different places, I had to come and go quickly. But it didn't take long to notice that the spirit of the wounded was amazing, and that the soldiers in the camps were the same type of fun-loving ribbers I had met in the places I had left behind.

There wasn't a cast on a leg or arm in a hospital that didn't have the autographs of the other patients. Some had pictures drawn on them, with witty sayings. I was no longer shocked to see one kid kick another with the stump of a leg.

In one of the wards, a soldier called me over. "Al, come here," he said—everything was informal—and turning to another soldier, he added, "Hey, buddy, show Al that bullet they took out of you."

It was the biggest bullet I ever saw. The kid had been shot in the thigh and until they took it out, he wasn't able to sit down for fear it would explode. Luckily the bullet was a dud.

"They weren't supposed to get me yet," the boy said simply as he threw it over to the other GI.

"Well," the other guy remarked, "the one aimed at me got me."

His leg had been shot off.

Later, I asked the doctor who accompanied me through the wards about these kids.

"You must see a lot of this," I said.

"Don't worry about these kids," replied the doctor. "Their spirit is great—nothing stops them—and we do our best for them."

The doctor, of course, was modest, for better than 90 per cent of the wounded get completely healed. The surgical wizardry of these Army and Navy medics sounds unbelievable, but having seen the results in some cases, I know it is true.

Food conditions in Algiers and at the camps in the desert around it were not too good, but nobody squawked. Because of the intense heat in the daytime, there was no refrigeration possible. Anyway, it was a good sign that the boys were always hungry and always kidding about the food.

"Pass me that steak, Al," a GI would shout across a mess table to me.

The steak was a piece of Spam.

Of cigarettes and chocolates they got a limited number from the PX or Post Exchange stores—but it was always enough because they were always trading with each other and the guy who didn't like chocolate bartered with the one who didn't smoke. I also found out what became of the nickel cigar—they had them all down here.

These soldiers were the most obliging fellows I ever met—they always wanted to do something for you. They were always asking me where I was going next—as if I knew—and they would warn me about certain places.

"If you go to England," said one boy, "I got a lantern. You'll need it to get through that fog."

The supply department was run just like a department store. I hadn't brought many changes of clothes with me, and only one pair of shoes. The rubber heels on my shoes had worn out badly. I went to the tent where supplies were issued and said to the soldier in charge, who came from Rivington Street on New York City's lower east side: "How about a pair of rubber heels?"

"Where do you think you are?" he came back, and threw me a pair of heavy Army shoes, with wooden heels. I wore those shoes until I returned home, and still have them.

When it came to clothing, the bargaining started.

"Do you want them wholesale?" he asked.

"I don't care if it's wholesale or retail," I replied, "just give me something I can wear."

He gave me what I asked for, in this instance an Army shirt and some underwear.

"I think I'll give them to you wholesale—you seem like a nice fellow," he said.

"Well, what's the difference—how much do I owe you?" I inquired.

"Nothing," he said, laughing.

Everything was wholesale here and wholesale meant for nothing, but even for nothing they still had their fun.

At six o'clock of my second morning in Algiers, I ran into an old acquaintance in the lobby. I was walking out and striding toward me was Quentin Reynolds, the war correspondent. Quent has been a friend of mine for a long time and a swell guy despite that. He's the kind of fellow you say hello to one night in New York and the next night you hear he's just landed somewhere in Sicily. You mention a front and if he hasn't been there, just skip that one because it's not worth bothering about.

We greeted each other warmly, and I saw that he had on a dirty-looking uniform and that he needed a shave, and he certainly looked as if he could use a little sleep.

"Where are you stopping, Quent?" I asked.

"Stopping," he said, "I'm just standing. John Steinbeck, a couple of other war correspondents, and I just got in and there isn't a place to stop in this town. We stayed around the lobby all night."

I felt like a bed hoarder, with two beds in my room and up to now nobody to share them with.

"My friend," I said generously, "I don't know whether it's against Army regulations to let strangers into a special room like mine, but I am appointing you my aide, so that makes it official. You now have a bed."

He almost kissed me and practically carried me to my room. He immediately proceeded to call the other war correspondents—Steinbeck, Reynolds Packard, and Jim McWilliams, dean of British war writers—who were waiting at the correspondents' headquarters. He invited them all up to the room. Five minutes before, I possessed two beds. It was now



a toss-up whether I'd have any at all. But it really didn't matter. These fellows deserved them, and I did most of my sleeping at the camps anyway.

That afternoon I did my first show aboard a Navy ship—the cruiser *Savannah*. This was one job I could pretty nearly walk to, since the ship was one of the hundreds anchored right off the harbor. I approached it and saw that it was steaming furiously.

"What's all this steam?" I asked a sailor, after introducing myself.

"We're letting off steam so you can work, Al," the sailor replied, and I had a vague suspicion that he was kidding me.

Working on the deck of a ship gave me a new thrill and a definite feeling that this was one place where a guy who couldn't swim didn't dare lay an egg. The sailors, however, turned out to be a warm, appreciative audience. We were handicapped for space and they took advantage of every spot from which they could watch my antics. Those that couldn't see from a standing position around me sat on the gun turrets or the rail.

I mingled with the boys after the show, answering their questions about home and baseball. Just like the Army GI's, the sailors were terrific baseball fans. Somehow or other, it seems, conversations with servicemen also always include the mention of girls, and I joshed them about the "girl in every port" rumors.

"That's a lot of Army propaganda," they cried emphatically. "After looking at some of the Arab women around here, we're sticking to American girls."

They in turn ribbed me about spending so much time with the Army.

"You're only wasting your time entertaining those guys, Al," they said. "Hang around with the Navy and you not only meet the nicest people but you get the best food—in fact, the best of everything."



The rivalry between the Army and Navy was really something. The boys didn't mix in port—they'd be pals in battle but that's where it ended. Occasionally, whenever it could be arranged, they had Army-Navy ball games in a port, and they'd bet everything they had on their teams. You'd think a World Series game was being played from the excitement a game created, and every close play brought a heated argument.

The boys of the cruiser *Savannah* were a fine gang of fellows, typical of all the Navy men I entertained from time to time. Only a short while after they pulled out of Algiers, I learned the ship had been bombed off Salerno. But like many of the American ships, it survived the bombing and as far as I know is still blasting away at the enemy.

My room at the Alletti, whether or not I was in it, became the intelligence headquarters of Algiers. The war correspondents were always there and most of the time they had visitors. One of these visitors was General Terry Allen. The General came to the room quite frequently and he would yell at Quent Reynolds for coming in late. He even left notes on my bed which always asked the question: "When do you guys sleep or do you ever go to sleep?"

It was in the presence of the General that one night, possibly encouraged by some of the wine I had inhaled, I told them why we couldn't lose the war. Up to now, I never dared to say much. What could I say in the face of so much intelligence? I figured they not only had me outnumbered, they also had me outwitted.

But this particular night they gave me my first opening. I don't know exactly how the thing started, but an argument was going on about the merits of the different armies and the ability of the soldiers—French, German, English, American, and so on—and someone asked Jim McWilliams: "Which army has the best soldier?"

McWilliams, who had been a war correspondent in World War I, and has seen nearly every fighting man of every coun-

try under fire, spoke up without hesitation: "The German soldier, of course," he said.

Mac happened to be wearing a cast on an arm he'd broken while covering the Sicilian campaign, and I picked up a pencil and wrote on the cast: "You're nuts."

"Why," asked McWilliams, "am I nuts?"

Schacht was in the middle again and pantomime wouldn't get him out.

"Well," I began, "I know you fellows have had more experience than I as far as wars are concerned. I haven't seen any fighting, and probably won't. But I go only by results. I'm a clown, and as a clown I have seen the American boy in training when he didn't even know how to hold a gun. I have seen him in North Africa, where he was a trained soldier waiting for the call to battle; and I have seen him come back from battle, never griping whether he won or lost—and most of the time he won."

"What's that got to do with what we're talking about, Al?" inquired McWilliams.

"That's what I'm coming to," I replied. "With me it isn't a question of what should have happened but what happened, and I'm going to show you that the German soldier is not so hot when you match him up with an American kid."

They laughed.

"Go ahead, Al," they said. "You show us."

"All right, smart guys," I declared, "I'll show you. Take a baseball club that's always losing by one run. People call that a hard-luck ball club. Hard luck, hell—this club just hasn't got the stuff.

"Now, there once was a manager with a fighter who looked like a cinch to win the heavyweight championship of the world. They built him up in the tank towns against ordinary local talent and he knocked everybody dead. They finally brought him to New York and in his first fight in the Garden, he was knocked out in the first round.

"The manager was certain there must be a mistake. This

guy couldn't lose. So he laid him off for two years, building him up slowly, sent him through the tank towns again, and again he was sensational. Sure that everything was in the bag, the manager booked him for a fight in Detroit. The night of the fight the promoter was out of town, and he didn't miss a thing—the tank-town wonder was knocked out.

"The promoter was furious when he returned and read about the fiasco. He called the manager.

"What is this?" he shouted. "I thought your man was supposed to be terrific. What happened? He's big, isn't he?"

"Well," said the manager, "he's six foot two."

"That's quite a size," declared the promoter. "How much does he weigh?"

"He weighs a hundred and ninety."

"That's a great weight for that size. How about his right?"

"Sensational, and his left is even better—the best I've ever seen."

"How is his footwork?"

"Footwork—why, he's like chained lightning."

"What, then," screamed the promoter, "is the matter with him?"

"Well," replied the manager sadly, "he's got everything but he just can't fight."

My audience was impressed but puzzled.

"What's your point, Al?" they inquired. "Who the hell is talking about prize fighters?"

"You'll see in a minute," I said. "Now, take the German soldier. He had everything in the first war, was knocking everybody around but was stopped at Paris by a lot of taxicabs and all of a sudden he broke down and lost that war. For twenty years they built him up again and he started all over, knocking the little guys down. It looked like he had a pushover. He was trained to be a soldier from the cradle and nobody could stop him—but what happened?"

"He blitzed England, bombing it practically to bits—but he couldn't take England or even crack her nerve. He attacked

Russia and gave her three months to hold out. He was in Stalingrad but he couldn't take Stalingrad. He was a quarter of an inch out of Moscow but he didn't take Moscow. He was about a sixteenth of an inch from Leningrad, and he didn't get that city either. And he had North Africa, too—he was one-tenth of an inch off the Suez Canal—but here we are and where is he?

"I'll admit the German soldier is a well-trained soldier—that he is brave and dangerous in battle—but like the team that always loses by one run and the fighter who can't win against the big ones, he lacks something. Maybe it's initiative, because without leadership he's lost. As a matter of fact, I was in a camp for German prisoners recently and I swear I saw an officer give orders under a shower bath—take soap, turn on the water, rinse off, sit down. Without orders, the German soldier couldn't even take a shower bath.

"Now, with all respect to our Allies, I give you the American soldier. He did it in the last war and he's doing it again. He's born with a free mind and learns to think for himself. You take him from behind a soda fountain, or off a farm, and put him in the Army. In six months he's a trained soldier, ready for battle not because he wants to conquer the world but to protect his country and his way of living.

"Then he gets into battle, and something happens to the commanding officer. So the sergeant takes over, and gets the same respect. Or it might be the corporal who's next in command. And if one of our kids gets lost, what happens to him? You read about it all the time, and you writing fellows are writing it. Five days later the kid returns to his own camp, and nine out of ten times he's got some German prisoners with him. He's got a free mind and he knows how to use it. I'll take the American kid on my ball club any time."

Usually I talk too much but for once in my life I felt I had said something worth while. Everybody, even McWilliams, congratulated me on my speech, if not my logic. A little limp from the strain, I accepted their praise.

"Aw, that was nothing, fellows," I said modestly.

What really made me feel great, however, was General Allen's comment. The General slapped me on the back and said, quite seriously, "You're right, Al. I'll take the American kid, too—any time, and any place."

I guess he ought to know.

## 6. TRIPLE PLAY—TUNIS TO SICILY TO BIZERTE

TUNIS is about four hundred miles from Algiers but only a hundred fifty miles of Mediterranean separates Tunis from Sicily, and that's close enough to the plate to get beaned. Flying along the coast to Tunis, I recalled Zeke Bonura's "fireworks," but that didn't bother me as much as a certain feeling that was rapidly coming over me. I was homesick.

Here I have been trying to make thousands of GI's forget about it—and some of them have been here for many months—and I catch the disease myself after a little more than a month. It didn't linger long, however. I put on a show in a warehouse off the docks for the Navy and the sailors not only talked me out of it, but chased it completely by giving me the first American beer I'd tasted since leaving New York.

It's remarkable how a little American-made beer and good company can change your outlook on things. Before we knew it, everybody was singing, and I even added my falsetto to a quartet. I hadn't felt so good since I talked umpire Bill McGowan out of a fifty-dollar fine.

Tunis was a hub of activity. There weren't too many ships in the harbor, because the harbor installations had been damaged by the bombings, but the few ships that did come in and go out told their own story. There were ships taking supplies and soldiers to the front, and ships bringing back the wounded. I watched buddies removing the wounded from the ships in stretchers and placing them gently in the waiting ambulances. There was a row of four stretchers in each ambulance.

Later I saw the wounded being checked into hospitals at a tent rigged up for the purpose. There would be a long line of boys, some standing under their own power, most lying on the stretchers. But I never heard a whimper of any kind, and was

amazed at their spirit. Standing, or lying flat on their backs, they'd bum cigarettes from each other and smile or wink to me and the other onlookers.

"How're ya doing, buddy?" one of them asked me.

He's seriously wounded and he asks me how I'm doing.

There were more soldiers and naturally more camps in Tunis than in the other ports and towns I'd appeared at. This was an embarkation point, and the soldiers didn't stay around long. The faces kept changing all the time and the signs of "Tents to Let" were more prominent than ever. There were also more Arabs here than I had seen before, and since the Arabs had a habit of stealing clothes from the camps, it was no surprise to see such warnings as: "Any Arab Caught in Camp after Dark without a Light Will Be Shot."

The signs were meant to scare them and did. Not many ventured out after dark from the hills in which they lived and they must have done their stealing in the daytime. Clothes continued to disappear, as mine did shortly after my arrival in Tunis.

My work in Tunis and the surrounding desert camps and hospitals was a little different than I had done before. They gave me a GI band to work with here, and it added a new touch to the act—a musical touch. We'd put on jam sessions from the backs of trucks, and have community sings. This band had a leader, of course, but I would take his baton away from him and add some new motions to the art of waving the stick.

I must have made a pretty picture, standing on the truck, my back to my audience, making weird gestures and wiggling my anatomy. My clowning outfit completed the ridiculous setup, and the boys ate it up. At every show in which I worked with the band, I'd take the clarinet away from one of the musicians and make a little speech.

"Fellows," I would say, "you didn't know this and I hate to brag about it, but when I play the clarinet guys like Benny



Goodman burn with jealousy. What do you want to hear me play?"

They'd shout out the names of songs, and quite a few even yelled out: "We'd rather have Benny Goodman," but I'd ignore the insults, pick out a number, and start to play. The kids didn't know what to expect—they didn't know whether I could play or not—and as I put the clarinet to my lips, the silence was complete. Dramatically, I put the instrument through the motions, my head waving and bobbing with it. The music sounded marvelous, and they would start cheering me.

Just before the finish of the number, I would take the instrument from my lips and start wiping the perspiration off my brow. The music continued anyway, and the cry they raised could be heard in Sicily.

"Fake!" they screamed, and the razzing they gave me reminded me of my pitching days.

Then I would call out the real clarinet player from the back of the truck where he had been making all the music and they'd give him a big hand and everybody was happy.

Originally, the band and I would separate after each show and I'd arrange to meet them at another camp or hospital, wherever I was scheduled. But that didn't work out so well. The band would show up in one camp, and Schacht in another, and when they did come to the right camp, they were always late. I decided to stick with them and find out what delayed them. It seems that when they started out to meet me, they began picking grapes along the road and didn't really get going until they'd eaten their fill of grapes. With me along, we didn't arrive late any more. We started out earlier, that's all—I like grapes, too.

The GI's, I noticed, were always hungry and always eating, it seemed, and that's the best sign of all—there's nothing wrong with a guy with a good appetite.

One of the shows I did in Tunis was in a camp where they made all the bread for the enlisted men within fifty miles. There were a lot of Italian prisoners in this camp and about



five-thirty in the afternoon we got the report that Italy had surrendered. That night the noise, music, and singing among the Italian prisoners was terrific. You'd think Italy had just won the war and they were celebrating.

In between shows, I'd sit around with the boys in the camps and we'd have continual bull sessions. I'd let them do most of the talking and some of them could really tell stories. Occasionally, when there was no interference, they'd turn on the radio, but the only thing they could get was short wave from England and they always wound up with Lord Haw-Haw. They really gave him the haw-haw. He would keep pounding away at the boys' morale with such stories as:

"The Germans are going to recapture North Africa—they have just taken Casablanca."

"Let 'em come," the boys would laugh, "and we'll finish this war right here."

Although they got very little news of the progress of the war, and the only newspapers they received were the Army's *Stars and Stripes* and the *Sporting News*, the baseball Bible, they knew that whatever Haw-Haw told them was the bunk.

While the days were intensely hot, the nights were cold, and one night I nearly froze to death. A soldier, noticing my plight, gave me an extra blanket and I didn't learn until the next morning that he slept in his uniform so that I could be warm.

One night we had a little excitement. A few of the boys and I were sitting in front of my pup tent, when we saw a light heading for us from the hills. It turned out to be an Arab waving a flashlight and pointing to the hills. Nobody could understand him, and a sergeant turned to me and said, "Al, what in the world is this guy talking about?"

"How the hell do I know?" I replied. "I'm no Arab."

Somebody finally decoded his gibbering and his story was simple but to the point. There were five German paratroopers in his hut up the hill.

The boys got all steamed up.



"This is a terrific airplane," I said nonchalantly. "It runs without motors."

These flying guys were slightly terrific, too, and even in midair, over territory which was always dangerous because of enemy action, they played their little jokes.

With or without motors, we landed at the Catania airport about noontime. It was a terribly hot day, and we were standing in the shade of the wings of the plane waiting for transportation from the airfield when we heard the hum of motors overhead. The pilot grabbed me by the seat of the pants, gave me a shove, and yelled, "Get down, Al—get down!"

I got down—I could find out later if they were kidding again—and they got down beside me. I peeped upward and there were six enemy planes coming straight for us. I was scared to death. The strafing lasted about a half a minute and I was certainly glad their control was lousy and they couldn't find the plate.

The fliers got me to my feet but I wasn't sure it was the right thing to do.

"Do you think I ought to get up so soon?" I inquired weakly.

"Sure," they assured me. "You get up and shake and if you can shake you're O.K."

I shook all right.

"You can put this down in your book," I said. "This war is on officially from now on as far as I'm concerned."

Telling the Germans you're a noncombatant is like asking the Dodgers to love the Giants. I felt like cabling the Luftwaffe that I was Al Schacht from the Bronx, not Hjalmar from Berlin. These guys were always killing each other off.

A jeep picked us up at the Catania airport and as we rode along I could hear the most depressing rumble. We finally caught up with that rumble—and right there I got my first view of an army on the march. Moving like huge caterpillars up the road as far as the eye could see were hundreds of tremendous tanks, and I learned they were British Eighth

Army tanks heading for the Messina Road. I got the most ghastly feeling as the tanks rolled over the cobblestones, one after the other, with Tommies with dirty, dust-covered faces peering from each one.

Something big was brewing—these fellows weren't out just for exercise.

We yelled to them—it was hard to make yourself heard above the terrific noise—and they shouted back, waving their hats. We could make out an occasional "Cheerio," and you got the feeling that no matter where they were going they were confident that they would come out victorious.

With the rumbling still in my ears, we arrived in Catania proper, and I was assigned to a hotel. Only half of this hotel remained standing but nobody seemed to notice. Catania had been bombed terribly and in some areas there was hardly a building which was whole.

There was a frightening speed to everything about you. I had just arrived but I was taken immediately to the Catania Opera House for my show. I will never forget the Opera House. I am used to seeing cars, hundreds of them, parked around a baseball stadium, but instead of cars, tanks surrounded the Opera House—the same type of tanks I had seen and heard on the road. The Opera House itself had no roof. It had lost its headpiece in a bombing.

Inside the Opera House I looked at my audience for the first time and got a feeling of awe. In the camps and hospitals where I had worked up to now, the soldiers would be dressed informally—no ties and most of the time ordinary fatigue clothes. Here was something new, something big. The soldiers wore full battle regalia. There were about four or five thousand in the Opera House, and I noticed Tommies with tank helmets flooding the balcony, while American GI's were in the orchestra. The Americans, I discovered later, were part of the great Seventh Army. They would be leaving right after the show for a show much bigger than mine.

An officer was about to introduce me when I noticed a

group of eight Sicilian girls on the stage. Turning to the officer, I said, "What are these girls doing on the stage? I don't use a chorus in my act. I work alone."

"These girls, Al," he explained to me, "used to belong to the Opera House chorus. They just came out of the hills to create good will and we had to give them some kind of a job. This is the best job we could give them. They entertain our troops—just to create good will."

"Well, that's O.K. with me," I said. "Far be it from me to interfere with a little good will. What do these girls do—sing or dance?"

"Neither," was the answer. "They just stand on the stage for atmosphere."

He introduced me to the soldiers and just then a photographer snapped a picture of me. There was the usual flash of the photographer's bulb, and with it I heard three thuds. I looked around me and there were three of the Sicilian girls flat on their faces. They had fainted.

Under other conditions, this might have seemed like a funny situation. Here it was tragic. These girls had been so terrorized by the continual bombings of Catania, that the slight noise and flash of a mere bulb frightened them half to death.

I never tried so hard in my life to please an audience, and I doubt if I ever had a better one than these four or five thousand boys who did not know where they were going after this but certainly knew they were going to a fight. They never showed it. They cheered everything I did and a good bit of the cheering came from the Tommies in the balcony. I'm sure they didn't understand much of what I was doing or saying but my pitching motions of the conceited pitcher must have looked funny to them, and even the frightened Sicilian girls laughed when I fell flat on my face after missing the keys in my piano recital.

The show completed, I wished them good luck and returned to the hotel. My stay there would be a short one be-

cause at six o'clock that evening I was to move up to the Messina Strait for a show for the American Fifth Army, or it might have been some other army. The Army doesn't allow you to keep a diary, and my memory for details has always been bad—so bad that the only things I remember is the play by play of the few games I won as a pitcher.

In the hotel I arranged with a sergeant to be my alarm clock, there being no alarm clocks handy. He promised to call me, and I knew he would because some of the most reliable people in the Army are sergeants—that's why they are sergeants.

For the first time since I had been in Catania, I went up to my room. The bed, I saw, must have been up against a wall originally, but in this room one of the walls was missing. They had the bed against the entrance to the clothes closet.

Before retiring for even a small nap, I always liked to read a while. I was laying in bed going through an old copy of *Stars and Stripes* when I heard the darnedest noises. Looking out, I saw shells bursting in the air. I didn't see or hear any planes—nothing but black smoke and bursting shells. Suddenly a big piece of shrapnel hit on the balcony outside my room and, with no wall to stop it, went right through the room. In fact, it not only went through the room but through the other wall.

Now I not only had a southern and northern exposure, I also had cross ventilation.

"This is not for me," I said to myself, and with the brilliance that I am noted for I pushed the bed aside and got into the clothes closet. In doing that, I didn't notice I had shoved the bed against the door to the room, and that the closet door had snapped shut.

The sergeant, meanwhile, came rushing up to get me to a shelter, but he couldn't get into the room because the bed was against the door and I couldn't get out of the closet. I kept hammering on the closet door and he kept crashing against the other door and between us we made more noise

than the air raid itself. By the time he got into the room and I got out of the closet the air raid was over, and it was already time for me to head for the Messina Strait—that little body of water which is the connecting link between Sicily and Italy.

It is about a hundred miles straight up the coast from Catania to Messina, and as our little jeep scampered swiftly along, we were accompanied by a now familiar and more significant roar. The British tanks and Tommies were with us again. I was going to do a show, and they, whom I had entertained only a few short hours before, were on a different, more vital mission. Passing each tank, watching them wave cheerfully to you and shouting words you couldn't hear, you'd think they were on a joy ride.

"So long, fellows," I yelled. "Good luck to you."

That night I put on my show at a camp on the Messina Road. These American boys, like the Tommies, would be in battle before another day was over, maybe even sooner—we were moving so fast at the time. How fast I learned not long afterward.

After the show they assigned me to a tent, and I hadn't been asleep too long when I was awakened by violent thundering and I thought the world had come to an end. It was about four in the morning and a thin strip of dawn was just beginning to break. The skies were filled with planes—ours and theirs—and there were dog fights all over. From all sides guns were booming away. This was war and there was no mistaking it.

Excitedly I turned to one of the many soldiers watching the action.

"What's going on around here?" I shouted.

"This is it," he shouted back at me—the noise was terrific. "The British Eighth Army has just invaded Italy."

It didn't sound possible but it was true. What seemed only a few hours before I had met some of these likable Tommies and their huge tanks on the road to Catania. I had given them



a few laughs in the Catania Opera House, and had been beside them up the Messina Road. While I was sleeping, they had kept on across the Messina Strait to join the infantry in the opening battle of the fight to liberate Italy.

I looked around at the American boys near me. Soon they, too, would be in there while I would be heading back to the comforts of home. There was nothing I could do about that but I felt strange, and humble, and proud for the privilege of being close to them and being allowed to entertain them.

With the sight I had seen in Messina still before my eyes and definitely stamped in my mind, we headed back for Catania where I got a plane for Bizerte. My stay in Sicily had covered just about one day but they certainly loaded the bases on me.

Bizerte proved to be quite a place, although when you first looked at it, it was like a ghost town. In taking the city back from the Germans, our boys left only two or three buildings standing. The boys must have figured they'd need a few offices. Everything else was blasted to bits and there wasn't even a dog living in the town.

I had breakfast in the military restaurant my first morning in town and discovered that the waiters and cooks were German prisoners. Some of them were only about sixteen years of age. While I sat, eating away, one of the German prisoners came over to me. He was about twenty-four or twenty-five years old.

"You're Al Schacht," he said in almost perfect English, and I didn't know whether to be surprised or flattered that my fame had spread to Germany.

"Yes, I'm Al Schacht," I answered. "Who told you?"

"You don't know me," he said, "but I have seen you at the Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds many times. I'm a graduate of New York University, class of 1938. And by the way, are the Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds still standing?"



"Why do you ask me that?" I inquired, a little bewildered.

"We heard that New York was strafed and bombed right down to the ground," he replied. "Who's got Casablanca?"

"Let me tell you, my friend," I said in a fatherly tone. "Don't believe everything you hear. Germany hasn't got a damn thing and she won't have a damn thing when it's all over."

The boy himself wasn't a bad sort on the surface and it was hard for me to understand how a boy who was a baseball fan could believe in the Nazi way of life.

I got another insight into the GI sense of humor, and the power of the press, when someone handed me the first mimeographed soldier newspaper I had seen in North Africa. The paper was put out by the 61st Station Hospital, and it happened to be the first edition. They hadn't been able to agree on a name for the paper as yet, so they titled it "*Name Please,*" with a big question mark through the middle.

"Al Schacht Here!" the top headline read, and the story under it said in part:

"Al Schacht, the Clown Prince of Baseball, who has evoked gales of hysterical laughter from millions of baseball fans, several American presidents, and countless crowned heads of Europe, will appear at our diamond at 1400, Saturday, Sept. 11, 1943, before, during, and after a game between the 61st Regulars and the 26th General."

What an imagination those kids had. I not only had never been to Europe but the only crowned head I ever saw was the guy I beamed in Baltimore one afternoon when I was a little wild.

I glanced through the paper, which distinctly said "African Edition," and discovered that a Private First Class Romano was the editor in chief, and that a nurse, Lieutenant Ruth Hamilton, was associate editor. The sheet was eight pages in length, and had everything but a name. It had an art director, a circulation manager, a sports editor, and more than a few

columnists. An editorial introduced the staff to the readers, and of Private Laufer, the humor editor, it said:

"Pvt. Laufer—if he lives long enough to see a second issue off the press—will hazard on his inimitable wit. 'Laugh with Laufer' might well be presented as his tag identification. Nevertheless, he carries a rifle for protection."

Of course, there was a column headed "How it's Done in Brooklyn"—there was always somebody from Brooklyn everywhere—news and gossip columns, and one aptly titled "Bitching Well," for gripes and grievances.

The humor was typical of the kind I'd come in contact with all through my tour of North African camps and hospitals.

"Pfc Lawson," one item read, "had a blood transfusion and lived. Immediately after asked: 'What if I have inside me blood of a Giant fan or a Dodger rooter?'"

Pfc Lawson was obviously a Yankee fan.

They even had a spot for the lovelorn, which the humorist Sol Laufer handled under the heading "Blowing it Out." And here is a question he got:

Dear Private Laufer,

I love two girls. One is poor and the other is rich. Whom shall I marry?

● Sgt. S.J.O.

The answer should have taught the sergeant never to ask a private for advice. It said:

Dear Sgt. S.J.O.,

I advise you to marry the poor girl because in all probability she will make a better wife and mother. I'll marry the rich girl.

You read that and find it hard to believe that these kids are hospitalized.

A lot of my work in Bizerte was done at the 81st General Hospital. Here I was particularly active with the boys and we had a lot of fun. They gave me hell. I was making myself the goat for all their answers and even brought some of them

up on the stage with me. It was my act but they ran it. We put on an amateur day, which is the same thing as an amateur night.

"All right, you wise guys," I said, "see if you can sing. Come on up here and maybe we'll have somebody dancing."

What was supposed to be an hour show turned into a two-hour affair, and the only reason we stopped, the seven thousand GI's and I, was that it was getting dark and you couldn't put any lights on around there.

Shortly before leaving Bizerte, I clowned at a soft-ball game on the docks for the Navy. It was a makeshift ball field, full of dirt and dust, and when I got through taking falls and the players finished playing we all looked like the 1943 edition of the "Blackbirds." You can't stay dirty around the Navy and I stripped to take a shower (a shower is six pails of water poured over you). I was down to my shorts when the siren wailed out. There I was, my pants in one hand, my bathrobe and shoes in the other, when a sailor rushed up to me.

"Al," he yelled, "you'll have to get off the dock and get out of here. The Jerries will be over in ten minutes."

Dressing on the run, and that's quite a trick, I found myself in the only convenient shelter available—a Bizerte sewer, with no accommodations for gin rummy. I was in one end of the sewer and a Special Service man was in the other and for three hours, while ack-ack guns blazed away to the accompaniment of tracer bullets—it was dark by this time—we were members of the Bizerte underground. The noise was even more terrific than thirty thousand Dodger fans cheering a seventh-inning rally. Finally it was quiet again, and I shouted to my sewer mate, "Let's get out of here, Mac. It's all over."

There was no answer from him.

In the language of the GI, he "blew his top"—passed out—and it was not until six months later that he was all right again. As for me, the terrible pounding remained in my head for about three days. I must have liked the Bizerte sewer system, for I spent another hour and a half in one just before

saying good-by to the GI's in Bizerte and heading homeward. Lucky guy, Schacht—these kids have to stick around to settle a few things and he starts for home. I guess I wasn't the only one in North Africa who wished the whole thing was all over, and we could all go home.

## 7. HOME RUN

WHEN your arm gets heavy around the seventh inning and every ball you pitch feels like a lead weight, you know those last few innings—if you last—are going to be a little tough. You may go along, pitching like a schoolboy wonder, until somebody reminds you, “Keep it up, old boy—only two more innings to go.”

“My God,” you say to yourself. “Have I been in there that long?”

That’s when your arm begins to feel heavy, and it was not until they told me that my schedule in North Africa was almost completed that I got that tired feeling.

After what I had seen those boys of ours go through, in training, at work and at play in the camps of North Africa, going into battle or coming from one, and in the hospitals, a guy like me had no right to feel tired—but I was. It made me realize all the more what astounding energy and spirit those kids have.

Six weeks of taking falls and doing an average of two stage shows and two hospitals a day left me limper than first base after a double-header. These soldiers, many overseas for a year or more, were not only in great shape but in addition to their regular duties voluntarily took long marches in full action uniform, with pack. I couldn’t even lift the pack. They did all the work and they were the “holler guys” who kept me going, too.

I was a bit sad, however, when I got the news that from Bizerte on I was working my way back to New York. You kind of get to like these boys when you know them even for a short while.

From Bizerte I went to a town called Bona, and there I

put on a show at a ball game before twenty thousand soldiers. These GI's were members of a tank battalion, resting after a long campaign in Sicily, and they were also the largest audience to watch me perform in North Africa. That's quite a crowd, and I don't know whether or not I made a mistake after the show by saying, "Fellows, I'm on my way home and I certainly wish you were going with me. Up to now, you guys have been feeding me, so it's only fair that when you get to New York, I should feed you. Come into my place and have a meal on me."

In fact, I said that almost every place I worked, and I was a trifle troubled trying to figure out what would happen if they all showed up in my restaurant at the same time. Can you imagine a million men fighting for a seat in a joint that only holds about a hundred and fifty?

My next journey was to a place called Constantine, up in the mountains on the way to Algiers, and all the way we were stuck behind a 400-truck convoy on a soft dirt road. We couldn't pass any of these trucks because there were more trucks going the other way, and for three hours we remained in the rear and ate dust. By the time we got to Constantine, the GI driver, the Special Service man, and I all looked like African Indians. It was my first lesson in Army camouflage.

Officially, my schedule of shows ended with the one in the hospital just outside Constantine. I remained there overnight and the next morning was privileged to see part of the Italian fleet brought into port by the British. In order to get the Clipper back to the States, I had to return to Port Lyautey, via Algiers. In Algiers I called Special Service to make sure my seat was O.K. on the Clipper.

There was only one little phone booth at the airport and I couldn't get my connection. Still trying to get through, I noticed a soldier pacing up and down in front of the booth. Finally he kicked at the door and shouted, "How about it? I got to get in there."

"Take it easy, buddy," I said. "What's your hurry?"

"Look, mister," he pleaded, "I met a girl here in Algiers about four months ago and this is my first chance to get back. I've only got about two hours and you've already taken about an hour of it. I not only would like to talk to her but I'd like to see her."

I gave him the booth. If he could wait four months to say hello to a girl, I could certainly wait another hour before finding out when I was going home after seven weeks.

My old friends of Hut Two greeted me at Port Lyautey and they told me immediately that if I was thinking of leaving right away to forget it—I couldn't leave for a week. For once, they weren't kidding.

"War is certainly hell," I said. "In the last war, the Army keeps me overtime because they need a pitcher on the Second Company team, and now the Navy is hanging on too because you guys want somebody to play jokes on."

Time in their hands passed quickly, however. They even gave me a ride in a PBY, the submarine patrol plane. It all happened when Lafferty asked me, "Ever been up in a PBY, Al?"

Lafferty was pleased when I said I hadn't.

"Well," he added, "I've got to try out a motor tomorrow morning. I've got to stay up for about five hours, so how about keeping me company?"

"I'll tell you what, Jack," I replied, "you try out the motor and if you like it, let me know, and I'll go up the next time."

"Oh, you don't have to worry," declared Lafferty. "It's a four-motor job. If two motors go off, we're still O.K."

Outmotored, I agreed to make the flight.

Lafferty was typical of the Navy men I had met—genial, jolly, and always trying to make the other fellow feel at home, despite his liking for practical jokes. I was fond of him, and when I'd tease him about the steaks he could get by visiting me in New York he would say, "You better make good!"



If I thought it was just Lafferty and I making the flight, I was mistaken, and began to suspect there was more than one of the motors involved when we were joined by two gunners and a co-pilot. One of the young gunners gave me his seat and sat on the floor beside me, and we had cruised around for about an hour when he turned to me and said, "You know, Al, we're on our way to Gibraltar, and if we see a submarine we're going down and blast it."

Now he tells me, and me only up there to try out a motor.

Well, since everybody seemed to be in on these jokes but me, I decided to have a little fun myself. Putting on the ear-phones by the gunner's seat, I grabbed the mouthpiece of the inter-communication system, or something, and in a commanding voice said to the pilot, who happened to be my trusting friend Lafferty, "Lieutenant Lafferty, are you there?"

"Yes, Commander Schacht," he replied. These fellows are always way ahead of you—he knew right away it was me.

"How is that motor?" I asked.

"Perfect, sir. And so are my meters." And as if it mattered, he read off all the meters. I start a joke and he's going to finish it.

"What is your position and how is your gas?" I demanded.

"My gas tanks are full," he reported, and reeled off some mysterious latitudes and longitudes to give me his position.

"Well," I ordered, "here are your orders. Turn sixty-two degrees right, seventy-three degrees left, and keep on going till you hit New York. When you come down I'll give you the damndest steak you ever ate in your life."

I relate this story only in view of future events. Three nights after I got back to New York, a gentleman in a Navy uniform walked into my restaurant, placed his hands belligerently on his hips, and shouted in a voice loud enough to be heard in Port Lyautey, "Where the hell is my steak?"

It was Lafferty—and I didn't have a steak to give him. He picked a meatless night for his dramatic arrival.



The boys tried everything in their power to make me think I was never going to get home and went as far as framing it with Al Jolson, who happened to be in Port Lyautey at the time, to make believe he had been given my seat on the Clipper.

When I learned that Jolson had my seat, I forgot we were friends.

"Jolson's got a priority over me!" I screamed. "Listen, my friends, Jolson would have to sing 'Mammy' eight million times on one knee and 'Sonny Boy' ten million times on the other before he gets my seat on that Clipper."

If you're a baseball fan and know what it means to get on a line about five o'clock in the morning so that you can get a seat to a World Series game to be played at three P.M., you'll understand how I felt waiting for that Clipper to show up. I knew also how the GI's felt about getting a seat on a plane for home. It's hell to be told one minute you're going and the next that you're not. I would have given up my seat for any GI, but never for another entertainer, even if he was a friend of mine.

The Clipper arrived and I might have committed murder when I saw Jolson walking toward it, only he saved his life by saying quickly, "Good-by, Al—have a nice trip."

The last laugh I had in North Africa was on me. I came to entertain, and to the very end they were still entertaining me.

Aboard the Clipper, a nurse pulled me aside and, pointing to a young soldier on a stretcher, said, "Mr. Schacht, that boy is very sick. He doesn't know it but he may not have long to live. If you can keep him cheerful on the trip home, it would make things a lot easier for him."

We did our best, without making it obvious that he was the one that needed cheering up, and he never let on once that he was any worse off than his fellow travelers. If spirit meant anything—that same spirit I had seen in the hospitals and wards of North Africa—that boy is still alive today.



have been awakened by the noise appeared at a window, and she was obviously glad to see us.

"Go away," she yelled.

We didn't go away, of course, and she must have been afraid we'd wake the entire town.

"Come around to the back door," she said weakly.

That was easier said than done. We had to find it first. We slushed through an alley, scaled a few walls, getting muddier all the time as we kept falling into holes, and we must have made a dismal picture when we finally found the rear door to the Gin Mill.

The barmaid had no intentions of letting us in—she was going to take no chances—but after the trip we had just made to get there, we wouldn't be denied. We had hardly set foot inside the door when in popped Mrs. O'Flaherty herself, from the front of the Gin Mill.

"What are you boys doing here?" she shouted.

"A fine welcome you give me after two months," I said in pained tones. "Is that what you call Southern Irish hospitality?"

She started to raise her voice again but we convinced her that she would only arouse the neighbors and then everybody would know she kept her place open on a Sunday. Every time she spoke loudly, Lieutenant Todd would yank at my coat and whisper frantically, "Come on, Al, let's get out of here before we all wind up in jail."

It was time to quit stalling and get down to business.

"Mrs. O'Flaherty," I said, "I'm here to get another bottle of Jameson's Irish whisky. How about it?"

"Are you insane?" she demanded. "There is no such thing."

We argued back and forth but she persisted.

"If you're trying to talk me out of another bottle," she cried loudly, "well, I haven't got it."

As she said this, she grabbed an apron from under the bar, wrapped it around something she got from a shelf, and pulled me out of sight behind the partition that separated the general

store from the pub. She then shoved a bottle—I saw it was Jameson's—into my inside coat pocket and whispered, "After all, I know you, but I don't know those boys."

Aloud, she said, "And the best I can do for you, Mr. Schacht, is a bottle of sherry wine. Take it and get out before the police find you here and shut my place for good. Now get out, all of you."

We left by the back door, as we had come in, and Todd's face was a picture of bitter disappointment. He didn't say anything until we had scaled the first wall.

"A bottle of sherry wine—we had to go through all this for a lousy bottle of sherry wine which we can get anywhere," he groaned.

"Never give up, Lieutenant," I said, patting him on the back. "Maybe something can still be done."

There, ankle-deep in mud, surrounded by chickens, pigs, and ducks, and with the rain pouring down on us, I lifted my face to the skies and in a very solemn voice declared, "Dear God, here I am a Bronx boy in Ireland trying to get a bottle of Irish whisky for an Irishman on a Sunday morning. I know it's tough but can You help me?"

I cupped my ear dramatically for an answer, and continued: "What? You can help me— You're going to drop it? O.K.—drop it."

With that I opened my coat, pretended to open wide the inside pocket, waited one tense second, and then took out the bottle of Jameson's. I handed it to the bewildered Lieutenant Todd, who must have thought I was completely nuts by this time.

"Here, Lieutenant Todd," said I, "here is your darn bottle of Irish whisky."

The rest of the trip to New York, through some of the toughest weather and the thickest fog I have ever seen, is one I'll never forget. It took some great flying by our pilot, Lieu-

tenant Stewart, to bring us in without accident, and we reached New York on Monday evening, September 27.

I was walking into my restaurant about nine o'clock that evening and there was my headwaiter hanging the blackout curtain over the glass of the front door. Twenty minutes later the sirens went off. It was a practice blackout.

After spending almost two months in the blackouts of North Africa and Sicily, and there they weren't practicing, I had to pick a blackout night to come home on.

"My God!" I shouted. "They're still after me."

It was great to be home.

## 8. NO GAME TODAY

WHEN a ball player has a day off, he sits around the lobby of a hotel and talks about baseball. He can't stand the inactivity, even for a day, fearing it might dull his batting eye or tighten up his throwing arm.

A soldier goes through the same feelings as an athlete in midseason. Not one I met ever denied he liked a furlough, but he was afraid he'd get to like it too much. They all knew they had a job to finish, that their time wasn't up until the season was over, and for that reason there was a restlessness in their movements that cried for a return to action. I knew exactly how those GI's felt.

I would be a cockeyed fibber if I said I wasn't glad to be home, but there was something lacking. Something else besides the doctors' hypodermics had gotten under my skin. After almost two months "in the Army," you can't just go right back to being a civilian. For the first few days I walked around in a daze, which may or may not be unusual, depending on how well you know me. But something was definitely missing, and it wasn't my fast ball. I lost that a long time ago.

Here I was, back in New York, the greatest city in the world—where you could eat steak at least seven times a week, if you had enough points and knew where to get it; where you could ride in taxis instead of walking four or five blocks, if you could find a taxi; where you could drink the best Scotch instead of awful-tasting North African wine, if you knew where to get it—but I didn't seem to enjoy any of it.

Instead, I found myself longing for another view of the desert, for another ride in a rough-going jeep driven by a reckless GI. I yearned for the company of the boys in Hut

Two, for the cheers of the GI's in the field camps or hospitals after a show, and for the good-natured razzing they gave me on more than one occasion. I missed the bull sessions in the wards and in front of the pup tents before retiring, and would have given up a ten-year contract to manage the Yankees to hear the pleasant shout of "Hi, buddy" as you shook the sleep out of your eyes in the morning.

Even a bite or two of good old K ration or a few nibbles of Spam would have been a welcome addition to my diet to pull me out of the rut I was gradually falling into. Things were too quiet, without purpose. Those kids had shown me a way of life I had never known before—life full of hopes, dreams, and ambitions. This war they were fighting did not change all that but only made them more determined to win the war as quickly as possible so that they could carry out their plans for a peaceful future.

Having been bitten by the GI personality, I knew that I would have to find a much better purpose for living than getting nine hours' sleep a day. I knew, too, that sooner or later, if they would permit me, I would have to take another trip overseas. The War Department and USO Camp Shows, which share the problems of overseas entertainers, get reports from their operatives on the reaction to the entertainers, and I hoped that the GI's had enjoyed my company at least one-half as much as I enjoyed theirs so that I could go over again.

My mind was full of these thoughts and it wasn't until Jack Lafferty came in demanding "that steak" that I snapped out of it enough to become a human being again. We relived our adventures in Hut Two, and it seemed the lieutenant, who now happens to be a lieutenant commander, started a parade of GI's into my place. They hadn't forgotten me.

One by one, and sometimes in bunches, too, boys I had been with in North Africa would drop in to renew old touches, and some even made a few new ones, but in their hands I didn't mind being home any more.

They kept me pretty busy, and there wasn't one who didn't invite me to his home for dinner, no matter how far from or near to home he was. If I were to go bankrupt tomorrow, I figure I have enough invitations to dinner to keep me going for at least ten years.

Meanwhile, there were other things to take up the time. There were bond rallies, trips to Army camps, appearances for the USO or for the Red Cross, and shows at Halloran Hospital, on Staten Island. There were also calls to mothers and relatives of the boys who had given me their numbers, and when I wasn't calling them, they were calling me. Strangely enough, I looked forward to the visits to Halloran Hospital. There were many at Halloran who had been shipped from the battlefields of Italy, and to me it was North Africa all over again. It was heart-warming to hear a kid say, "Hey, Al—remember? I saw you in Oran."

Or it might have been in Casablanca, or Bizerte, but I was gratified that they remembered I had been there. These kids didn't talk of the battles, they talked only of the fun.

When your day is full, the time goes fast, and before I knew it it was spring, 1944, and another baseball season had started. Before making any plans for a clowning tour, I called USO Camp Shows.

"What are the chances of my going over again?" I asked.

"The chances are very good," they said. "In fact, we want you to go over again."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" I inquired excitedly. "I'll get packed immediately. When do I leave?"

"Take it easy, Al," they quieted me. "We'll let you know as soon as we find a spot for you."

As time went by with no word, I felt like the relief pitcher waiting for the starting pitcher to crack. There I was in the bull pen, throwing a few warm-up balls every time the other team threatened, sitting down and getting up, but never knowing when I was going to be called or if I was going to be called at all.



Shortly after D-Day, in mid-June, one of the USO officials happened to come into my restaurant, and I demanded information. "When do I start again?"

"Do you really want to go again?" he asked.

All this time they thought I was kidding.

"Of course I want to go," I said, "if the boys want me. I'd like to go to France and wind up in Berlin."

"We'll see what we can do about that," he replied. "But you know where you should go, Al?"

I didn't know whether or not to commit myself on that, but a soldier never falters. "Where?" I asked bravely.

"To the South Pacific," he answered.

That was the first indication I had as to where I might be sent, but somehow the thought of going to the South Pacific didn't excite me. I figured that war was going to last a little longer than the other.

"I'll go wherever you send me or where the boys want me," I said, "but I'd really like to go to France first."

"We'll see," replied the USO official.

This fellow must have been related to an umpire. August was beginning to turn its last week—and I was beginning to feel like the veteran on whom waivers had just been asked and refused—before he "saw." I received a telephone call.

"Are you ready to go overseas again?" I was asked.

That's where I came in. This time, although my answer was again in the affirmative, I decided to show less enthusiasm.

"Certainly," I declared. "Have you something in mind for me?"

"We can't tell you anything yet, but start taking your shots Wednesday," was the startling reply.

That meant I would depart any day. These fellows may take a long time making up their minds, but they're really in a hurry once they do. What's more, they were still keeping secrets, but that was O.K. with me—I was used to that. The main thing was that I was going over—going over for a re-

union with the boys. I hoped I was going to France, where many of the kids I had met in North Africa were now in action, but that was a secondary thought. The boys of North Africa had given me a stamp of approval, otherwise I wouldn't be allowed to go over again, and no matter where they might send me, I would do my best to make good.

Wednesday, August 30, 1944, I started getting punctured again. On Saturday, September 2, I got another call.

"You are leaving Sunday at eleven P.M. Be ready at ten."

At 11 P.M., I was at La Guardia Airport. A little more than a year ago I had started from here on my way to North Africa, and I had the same feeling now as I had then. Where I was going wasn't in my mind so much as what I would see, and whether the boys would like me, and would I make good.

Shortly after our arrival at the airport, I found myself aboard a transport headed for San Francisco—final destination unknown. Of one thing, however, I was sure: San Francisco was no short cut to France. San Francisco meant the Southwest Pacific.

Funny thing, that's where I wanted to go all the time.

## 9. CIRCLING THE BASES

WHEN I landed at San Francisco Monday evening I learned that the plane which was to take me on the next leg of my trip wasn't ready yet, so I checked into a hotel to wait.

The next day, after putting on a show for the boys in the hospital at Hamilton Field, I went to Seals Stadium to watch a ball game. I hadn't said a word to anybody about anything concerning the trip, and was sitting in a box, discussing the future of baseball with Charles Graham, president of the San Francisco Seals, when the loud-speaker bellowed out:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have a great surprise for you. Sitting in a box is a man who has performed here several times, none other than our old friend Al Schacht, 'The Clown Prince of Baseball,' who is on his way to entertain the troops in the Southwest Pacific."

"My God," I almost screamed. "Everybody knows where I'm going except me. If the Army finds out the news leaked out, they'll cancel my trip."

From then on until five-thirty Wednesday evening, when we took off in a C-54 for Honolulu, I expected to have the trip canceled at any moment. By this time, I had learned that my final destination was New Guinea, and it was nice to know where I was supposed to go. If the trip was canceled, I could at least say it was a pleasure to know I might have gone to New Guinea.

The C-54's are tremendous affairs used for transporting men and equipment. There are no berths for sleeping on these planes, and any sleeping you do, you must do on the floor. If you get one hour's consecutive sleep a night, you're supposed to be doing pretty good.

My companions were twenty-five recently trained young

fliers, in addition to the crew, and I knew that with them aboard, I wouldn't have a dull moment. They were heading for their first chance at combat flying, and like all the other fliers I had met, veterans and rookies alike, they were not going to think about it.

For two hours we didn't even know we had been flying, but suddenly we got word that we were turning back. One of the motors had gone haywire. With nothing but ocean around you, news like that gives you a very nice feeling. They tell you before you leave that these ships take only three and one-half minutes to sink.

The young fliers didn't seem to worry about a mere motor, however, so neither did I. We returned safely to San Francisco, landing at the United Airlines Terminal, and by a strange coincidence my goose pimples disappeared as my feet touched the ground. It's funny how the slightest chill in the air will give me goose pimples.

The night was warm. We gathered in the little waiting room and the ham in Schacht came out again. I popped off and put on a show for my fellow passengers, and before we knew it the motor was fixed and we were off again.

The delay cost us five hours. We left San Francisco the second time at one A.M. and it was about noon when we landed at Hickham Field, Honolulu. The last time I traveled from San Francisco to Honolulu, in 1940, it had taken me exactly five days and six nights to make the 2,400-mile trip. This time we made it in eleven hours, which certainly should prove that I'm getting ahead in this world.

At two P.M. we were off again, and it was not until about ten that evening that we finally landed.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"We're in Canton," was the answer.

"You mean to tell me," I shouted, "that after all this traveling, after spending hour after hour rolling from one side of this plane to the other, that we wind up in Ohio!"

"Not Canton, Ohio, Al," they corrected me. "Canton Island—one of the Phoenix Islands, and we don't mean China, either."

It isn't much of an island. Its surface is almost entirely coral, and there was nothing, not even a hula girl, to make you feel like spending your vacation here. The soldiers stationed here wore nothing but shorts, and the air was exceedingly warm. For the first time I realized that one of the toughest assignments in the Army is to be stationed at a small, isolated base like this. It was important that they be there but they saw no action and the only activity was the occasional landing of a plane, heading for other parts.

We spent one hour in Canton but I answered a lot of questions about home and baseball for the GI's in that hour. I knew now why the boys at Port Lyautéy complained of the inactivity and craved for action. Because their job was "soft," they had more time to think—to think about home—and they were a little more lonesome than the others. And if it was tough on them in Port Lyautey, it was ten times as tough on Canton and similar scattered island bases.

At nine o'clock in the morning, nine hours after leaving Canton, we arrived in historic Guadalcanal, in the Solomons. This spot, which had seen so much action and had taken its share of American lives to become American, was very quiet when we landed. With its huts, its palm-fringed jungle, and its warm, tropic climate, I thought it looked something like Palm Beach, but I knew the boys who manned this island didn't think so. It was now an air base staffed by soldiers who had already done their part in the fighting, and in the brief time I spent there I learned their reaction to it. They didn't squawk when they said it, but I knew what they meant.

"I wish they'd either send us home," they declared, "or give us another crack at those yellow bellies."

"Al," one kid told me, "if it weren't for the baseball games and other sports we play, and the radio and letters from home,

we'd go nuts from doing nothing. Tell the folks to keep writing."

They didn't complain when they said it but were merely getting something off their chests. They had an assignment and they were carrying it out to the best of their ability although they would have preferred something more dangerous. And I was sure, when I left Guadalcanal after two short hours, that these kids would find ways to entertain themselves. They were too levelheaded and had too good a sense of humor to feel down in the dumps too often.

When we left Guadalcanal our next stop was to be Natzab, New Guinea, the place where they would drop me off and tell me that from here on out I was strictly on my own. The time spent on the transport in flight was always pleasant, because of the company, but never too comfortable. Sleep, of course, was almost impossible to get for me. The boys slept easily enough, but I don't know how they did it.

The boys were ribbing me about the bags under my eyes as we approached Natzab.

"What's the matter, Al—can't you sleep?" one asked me.

"Your eyes look like a seventh-inning rally," another one said. "Those bags are really loaded."

They felt heavy enough, at that, and more so under the kidding I was getting. The chances are they would have dropped off from sheer weight and I was beginning to imagine how silly I would look without bags under my eyes, when we landed in Natzab and I was saved from the shame of it all.

## 10. SHAGGING FLIES IN THE JUNGLES

I KNOW now why the War Department and USO Camp Shows never let you know where you're going until it's too late to turn back. All this stuff about its being a military secret is just camouflage. They just don't take any chances of anybody changing his mind.

Take New Guinea, for instance. If I had known I was going there and had taken the trouble of looking the thing up in a geography book or something like that, I probably would have enlisted in the paratroops, rangers, or some other outfit where a guy could be safe from harm rather than risk such a trip.

The books start off all right by telling you New Guinea is the second largest island in the world, and that it is in the West Pacific just north of Australia, but from then on it doesn't sound like an invitation to tourists. There is a line about the climate being unhealthy, and as if that wasn't enough, they add that New Guinea is inhabited by Papuans mixed with Malays and Polynesians, and notorious for its head-hunters and savage tribes.

My first impression of New Guinea from the air, after traveling some ten thousand miles to get there, was of one tremendous jungle on top of another. From the ground, it looked entirely different. It was a lot of jungles on top of each other.

It had taken me exactly one week to get to Natzab to find out that my work didn't begin there but that I had to get on still another plane for a place called Oro Bay. To make matters worse, nobody met me at the Natzab airport, and here I was—lost in the jungles.

I didn't know where to go and whom to ask where to go, and was afraid if I pestered too many people they'd really



tell me where to go. Meanwhile, a terrific wind was blowing and it began to look as if the wind was the only one around giving me a tumble. The fliers who had been my companions on the C-54 had already been taken care of, so I didn't have a friend in New Guinea.

Finally a jeep drove into the airport—it was a soldier picking up mail—and I determined to move into action.

“Look, my friend,” I said, “I’ve just come all the way from New York City. My name, if that means anything, is Al Schacht, and if it is not asking too much could you direct me to the Office of Special Services? If you can’t direct me, let me know where the nearest carrier-pigeon station is and I’ll get in touch with them that way.”

My name didn't impress him but he knew where the Special Services Office was, or was supposed to be, and he promised to get them to send a jeep for me. These soldiers keep their word—the jeep arrived in twenty minutes, which kept me from invading the jungles. In all fairness to Special Services, the reason they did not meet me was the one-day delay in my arrival.

Riding to headquarters, we were completely surrounded by hills, jungles, and mountains, and to me it looked like one huge layer cake with jungles at the base, in the middle, and on top. The mountains, I learned later, were part of the Owen-Stanley Range, reaching in some spots over thirteen thousand feet.

We got to headquarters without much trouble and I was ready to relax when I was told that I couldn't get a plane for Oro Bay that day but would have to stay over until the following morning. I knew right then that I should have wired my friend “Tarzan” Weissmuller for instructions on jungle sleeping. They told me I had to stay but didn't say where.

Natzab is only a little place, not a regular Army base, and while there were always a lot of soldiers around, they didn't belong to the small local unit. Most of them were hitchhikers from Australia. Hitchhiking was quite a fad around there.



When a fellow got a furlough, he thumbed a ride for another island. They call it island hopping out here, and after I got a look at a few of these places I wondered why they went through all that trouble. All the islands look alike.

All of which didn't solve my sleeping problem until an Air Transport Command sergeant by the name of Bill Wolfe came to my rescue and offered me a cot in his hut.

Under the guiding hand of Sergeant Wolfe, who proved definitely that sergeants really have souls, I was fed, and I learned then how handy these Army guys are. When I told him I was hungry, he replied, "I'll take care of that. It's no use going down the line—they have a lousy mess sergeant."

I was going to bawl him out for knocking another sergeant, but was afraid he wouldn't feed me and might even turn me loose in the jungles, so for once I kept my big mouth shut. Over a little gasoline stove—it wasn't even a stove, just a gadget with gasoline—he made me an excellent snack out of a can of bully beef, some powdered eggs, and jam, bread, and coffee. It was remarkable.

Well fed, I adopted my usual position of repose on one of the cots, and declared hopefully, "I think I'll take a little nap."

Somebody must have heard me. A few minutes later I got a call from Colonel Merchant, head of the Air Transport Command in that sector. He had discovered I was here and wanted to know if I would do a show for the boys that night. As if he needed to convince me further, he told me the boys here never got any outside entertainment.

Thus, at seven-thirty that evening, using a piece of the hill overlooking the air strip as my stage, I put on a show for some five hundred GI's. With no lights on—and it was almost dark—and only a loud-speaker to work with, I couldn't do anything except tell a few stories, but they cheered and laughed, which proved that our soldiers in New Guinea had not yet lost their taste for better entertainment.

To show his appreciation, Colonel Merchant invited me to

a birthday party in his hut immediately afterward, and everybody in Natzab must have been there. What's more, everybody had fun, including some Wacs and nurses who happened to be in Natzab at the time. The spirit of good-fellowship and informality prevailed here, and rank was respected but not practiced in these interludes of relaxation. These boys deserved all the fun they could get.

The next morning Colonel Kapp, whom I had met at the party, flew me to Oro Bay, a three-hour flight. We got there at one-thirty in the afternoon and shortly afterward were met by Colonel Clapp, of Special Services. The Colonel was happy to see me.

"Gee whiz, Al," he said, "I'm certainly glad you're in. I didn't think you were ever coming."

I explained the delay and he declared simply, "We've got to hurry. We've got you scheduled to work this afternoon—at a football game."

I couldn't believe my ears. Here it was 105 in the shade—and there was no shade—and he's talking of football.

"A football game?" I cried. "What is it—some Aussies playing soccer?"

"No, Al," he corrected, "not Aussies playing soccer but two American teams playing American football. It's the first football game in New Guinea."

"That," I said, "I've got to see."

I was scheduled to work between halves and we rushed away in the jeep for the football field. It took us twenty minutes to get there and there before me was probably the most unusual sight I have ever been privileged to behold. I have seen the Yale Bowl and other magnificent stadiums where football is played, but the Oro Bay Bowl topped everything.

Here was a bowl built by nature—a valley, deep and level, surrounded completely by mountains and hills. A football field, exactly measured, was marked off on the soft ground, and all around it, some standing on trucks or jeeps, others sitting around the side lines, and many more sitting on the

hills which made a perfect grandstand, were thirty-five thousand soldiers.

While two colored teams, dressed in gaudy uniforms, were warming up, two bands were marching up and down the field playing college songs. Each team had its own cheering section, and each its own mascot. One team had a white goat and the other a black goat. It looked as if I was back in the United States—I certainly never expected to see anything as amazing as this in New Guinea. But leave it to the American boy to take advantage of the natural resources.

The game itself was another surprise. These boys really played football in spite of the ground conditions, and the rivalry was keen. They slugged each other all over the field in the first half, finishing with a scoreless deadlock. The cheering was tremendous, with the noise increased a hundred times by the echoes from the surrounding hills.

In between halves, I put on my show. I clowned with the bands, leading them in futile marches up and down the field and going through letters with them. Every time they started to form a letter I would get the boys all tangled up, and by the time the second half started, everybody was dizzy.

The second half, like the first, was hard-fought. After every play, it would take about a half-minute for the dust to settle for anybody to find out what had happened or who had the ball. The ground was so soft that the dust would go high in the air with each pile-up, and it took only a few plays for the white referee to look like one of the players.

The center of one of the teams was possibly the funniest individual I have ever seen on a football field. He would crawl up on his knees as the play was called, and pass the ball with one hand. It was he who finally decided the ball game in the final three minutes of play. They switched the guy from center to backfield and he threw the ball from his own forty-five-yard line to the opponent's five, where one of his ends caught it and went over. They missed the kick for the extra point, and a second or so later a pistol went off

ending the game. Both teams got a terrific hand, and to make everything complete, the winning team proceeded to tear down the goal posts and marched off the field to the victorious blasts of its band. From the way these thirty-five thousand soldiers enjoyed the afternoon you'd never think there was a war going on and that they were right in the thick of it.

I spent six days in Oro Bay, covering the hospitals and camps. Here I got my first feeling of the hospitals of New Guinea and the boys who were the patients. The hospitals, like the 363rd, the 362nd, and the 139th Station Hospitals where I appeared, were all field hospitals—rows of huge tents, most of them having a gravel floor—but there was never a lack of medical supplies or medical attention. The bedding was always clean and the iron cots comfortable and new. And just as in North Africa, I was greeted with smiles in almost every hospital or ward I went into.

There were not only wounded in these hospitals but also victims of the common ailments produced by the jungles—malaria, jungle fever, and the mysterious scrub typhus. Better than 95 per cent of the boys recovered completely from the fevers and diseases of the jungle.

Oro Bay was quite a hot spot, and I mean strictly from the weather. It was terrifically hot—and dusty. All the roads were newly laid by Army engineers and they all happened to be dirt roads. Trucks were continually going up and down—hundreds of them, it seemed—and when you went from one camp to another in a jeep, the dust got so thick you'd have to stop for it to clear for fear you might run into somebody.

I figure I appeared before some ninety thousand soldiers in Oro Bay, which, at the time, housed the 38th Division, the 1st Training Center, and the 5th Replacement Depot, as well as a few construction battalions and the 278th Quartermaster Corps. There were ball games at each of these camps in the afternoon, and stage shows at night.

It was sweaty and hot working under that broiling sun, but

if the boys could take it for thirty-two months, I could stand it for seven weeks. The boys watched the games in informal comfort. Most of them were stripped to the waist, with a fatigue hat to protect them from the sun, and practically all of them wore sun glasses while watching the ball games or my zany antics.

As you drove from camp to camp, you realized what is meant by "home is what you make it." The American touch was everywhere—street signs which read "Broadway and Wabash," or it might be "West Palm Drive" or "Michigan Boulevard." There were signposts denoting the mileage to Tokyo and other Jap landmarks and a few more significant ones like "1,000,000 miles to New York." Every camp I visited had a Broadway.

It was in Oro Bay, at the 5th Replacement Depot, that I awarded the nose championship to Morrie Arnovich, former major-league baseball player with the Phillies and the New York Giants. I put on a stage show at the camp, and there was Morrie, a sergeant. I got him up on the stage with me, dramatically measured his nose with my fingers, and then measured mine, and gave him the title. It takes quite a nose to beat me. That was one gag that got a laugh everywhere, and at almost every camp or hospital I would pick out one fellow to match noses with and I always lost.

"You're the new champ," I would say, and the boys would roar their heads off and probably kid the guy for a week.

Needing a haircut badly, I was taken to the company barber by Arnovich. It seemed every camp had a fellow who cut hair, whether or not that was his business before joining the Army. Arny led me to a tiny shed and there I saw a sign which read: "BARBOR."

It was no surprise to me when the proprietor turned out to be a little fellow from Brooklyn whom I can remember only as Jake. But he was one of the funniest fellows I met in New Guinea. His barber chair was a big box and he wrapped a piece of paper around your neck and went to work without

ceremony. I knew from the first clip of his scissors that this was going to be a painful experience. But I enjoyed every minute of it.

The moment he had me on the chair, Jake started to talk about his girl. He admitted to being a big Dodger fan and I ribbed him continuously about how awful the Dodgers were, but he kept changing the subject to his girl. In the middle of cutting me up, he put down the scissors and showed me her picture and there was a look of worship on his face as he gazed at it. He kept talking about that girl and I kept kidding him about the Dodgers, and it was like two guys talking to themselves. I didn't think he paid any attention to me but knew he had the last laugh when he said, "You're finished now, Al—here's your haircut—and if you think the Dodgers were awful, wait until you take a gander at your haircut."

"That proves it," I said, feeling like a shorn calf. "You not only don't know how to spell barber but you don't know how to barb, either."

I offered him a tip and with an indifference that amazed me, he turned it down.

"What am I going to do with it?" he asked. "You can't spend any money here."

All the kids around here, I learned, had a disregard for money. Most of them put their money into bonds and sent them on home and the little they kept handy was used for frequent card games and an occasional fling of the dice. Naturally, some boys wound up rich one week and poor the next, but it kept them occupied and cheerful, whether they won or lost.

While the days were hot, the nights were cool, and sleeping was good. There were no mosquitoes in the daytime but at night you had to sleep with nets around you, and we had to take pills continually as a protection against malaria. The pills must have been very good—or the mosquitoes weak—for I saw very few men laid up with malaria.

My hut was right off the water and just to give you an idea



of the continual activity around there, when I'd go to sleep a convoy of fifty ships would be anchored in the harbor. The next morning, there were fifty different ships—the others had moved on.

I got a glimpse of the natives for the first time in Oro Bay and while they looked weird and funny, they were far from fierce. They did a lot of work for the soldiers but were not allowed to live within a mile of the camps. All the Japs had been wiped out of Oro Bay, so I naturally saw none of them. That was perfectly all right with me.

The native men and women all looked alike to me. They had one craze—they loved blond or reddish hair and would give anything or do anything for peroxide to color their hair. Some of them spoke very good English, which they had been taught by Australian missionaries. I was told they hated the Japs and that they would go on Jap hunts for the boys and that as evidence of their work they would come into camp with a row of Jap ears on a stick, just like pretzels. I'll stick to pretzels.

The food in the camps was very good most of the time, much better, in fact, than that I'd had in North Africa. There was more variety here—plenty of eggs and roast beef. Because of the heat, however, any shipment of meat had to be eaten right away. There was no refrigeration. The mess sergeant, as in North Africa, was one of the most popular guys in camp, especially if he was in a good mood.

Each soldier was allowed twenty-four cans of beer a month, and a lot of the kids who didn't drink beer had a lot of fun trading their beer for something else. These boys were always trading.

What amazed me most of all were the recreation facilities. They were terrific. In addition to soft ball, which was played all the time, there were handball courts and volley ball, as well as ping-pong and other games. After five P.M., when the work day was done, everybody would relax at something.

Before leaving Oro Bay, Morrie Arnovich presented me with a pair of jungle boots. "I hear you're going to Finschhafen,

Al," he said, "so you'll have to wear jungle boots. It rains there all the time."

I immediately put on the boots and, rain or no rain, I kept on wearing them. There is nothing halfway about Schacht.

From Oro Bay, on Sunday, September 17th, I was driven by jeep thirty miles inland to Lae. The road to Lae was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. Going through the jungles, you'd look at the road and imagine you were in Palm Beach. Our Engineering Corps certainly did a job on that road.

I was flown back to Natzab after my brief stay in Lae, and if I thought for one minute I had seen all of Natzab the first time, I learned I was mistaken. This time they had a hut for me to live in—a hut way up on a hill. There were only two ways of getting to this hut: one by climbing about seventy-five steps at an angle of about eighty degrees, and the other by a long route through the jungles which had to be made by jeep.

Three times a day I would have to go from the hut and twice to it—I always came back between shows for a siesta. Going up the steps took me at least fifteen minutes, and you couldn't slip once. It rained three out of the five days I spent in and around Natzab, so I asked for waivers on the steps in favor of the jungle route. On one of the trips we hit some mud on a dangerous curve around the mountain, and for one terrible moment I thought we were going straight down the side. It was about the closest I came to getting killed in all my trips and I thanked my stars for the capabilities of the American soldier drivers. They were carefree and reckless but they knew what they were doing all the time and were best in an emergency.

When I said good-by to the boys of Natzab I also made up my mind to give mountain climbing back to the Swiss.



## 11. RAIN—BUT NO POSTPONEMENTS

FINSCHHAVEN is the only place in the world where you can be knee-deep in mud and still get dust in your eye. I don't know how accurate the figures are, but the place, which is on the northeast tip of New Guinea, has the reputation of yielding rain nine months of the year. During the other three months there is a ten-minute letup twice a day, which is the equivalent of a sunny day.

It rains all day and then the sun comes out and bakes the top of the mud you're standing in, forming a layer of dust. You're still knee-deep, or at least ankle-deep, in mud, and along comes a wind—and there are plenty of winds, too, with nothing but water around you—and blows the dust in your eye. That's quite a trick but at least a hundred thousand GI's and Seabees will back me up, making it entirely authentic.

I arrived in Finschhaven on the morning of Thursday, September 21. It was raining. Rain or no rain, I will never forget that day. There was only one show and a radio interview on my schedule that entire day, but what a show! And imagine radio stations in the jungles of New Guinea. Give our boys time and they'll have television sets operating all over the Southwest Pacific.

The twenty-first day of September turned out to be the first anniversary of overseas duty of the 91st Naval Construction Battalion. This battalion, under the leadership of Commander Lorin J. Hewet, is one of the famous construction units of the Pacific war and I got a tremendous thrill working on the celebration program.

It's difficult to picture celebrations in the middle of a jungle which only recently had been a bloody battlefield, but the printed program and the events that followed proved that

these boys could not only build and fight but could take their fun as it came. The events of the day included, among other things not listed, a hundred-yard dash, a three-legged race, a wheelbarrow race, a sixty-yard dash, and a relay race of company teams. There were two soft-ball games—four innings each—featuring Hansen's All-Stars against Eddie's Rangers, and the officers against the chiefs. Later in the afternoon they staged the finals in the volley-ball and paddle-ball tournaments.

In addition, they were given a stage show and a movie at the theater that night, followed by an officers' dance. That's quite a program anywhere, and in the Southwest Pacific it was astounding.

When all was over, Commander Hewet invited me to a party at the Scorpion Club, something like the Hut Two of Port Lyautey, and we "tipped the bucket" full of Finschhaven punch. Watching the Seabees and their genial commander at work and at play I realized why the Americans always did things harmoniously in battle. There was no necessity for discipline with an iron hand, as in other, less fortunate countries. Here was a symbol of the respect and admiration of the enlisted man for his commanding officer. Each man had a job and he did it willingly.

Finschhaven was an amazing spot, despite the continuous rain. It was a light rain and didn't seem to bother anybody. The boys were well equipped for it with rain hats and rain-coats and jungle boots, and it was a common sight to see them watching a show in the open, sitting on logs in the rain.

The sight I will never forget and one which I saw quite frequently was a religious service in the rain. It didn't matter whether the service was Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish—there were services for all—and it was thrilling and awesome to watch the boys kneel in the mud, heads bared, and pray.

I was privileged to participate in the Yom Kipper services on the twenty-seventh of September, and there we sat in the rain, on the logs, from six o'clock in the morning to sundown.

Here in Finschhaven and other parts of New Guinea I got a closer view of the splendid work done by the chaplains, and when this war is over they should be given as much credit as the other heroes of the battles. They not only handled the religious services but took charge of recreation and entertainment and, when it was needed, were an inspiration to the men. They always had a kind, comforting word for everyone.

My stage shows in New Guinea were much more intimate than those of North Africa. I shared huts with the boys and mingled with them before the shows, and when I went on, I was one of them. It was more fun this way. They knew in advance that I was going to take them into the act and they would sit there, hoping they would be singled out.

The stages, constructed by the engineers, were remarkable, considering the conditions and the environment.

There were sometimes as many as ten thousand kids in my audience, and while hearing wasn't easy for me, they could hear me all right. As I went along, I would pick out one of the GI's to hear for me and he would stand on the stage with me, cupping an ear for every remark that was shouted at me. Most of them would be in answer to a question I had asked; some were uncalled for.

I would start the act, after doing some of my pantomime routines, by saying nonchalantly, "Is there anybody here from Brooklyn?"

Some would yell and others would stand up to indicate that they were residents of the Banks of the Gowanus. There were always boys from Brooklyn, and I guess from every other town in the United States, if I had asked, but mentioning Brooklyn was a good way to start things off, particularly an argument.

From the boys who stood up, I'd pick out one.

"So you're from Brooklyn?" I'd say sneeringly.

And the answers I got were terrific and some not at all complimentary.

"Yeah," one kid replied, "I'm from Brooklyn... but I used

to go over to the Stadium to watch the Yankees knock your ears off."

"Why bring that up at a time like this?" I would shout. "I just want to tell you guys from Brooklyn that there's a bus outside. It's leaving in ten minutes, so you can all get the hell out of here and get on it."

"Brother," they yelled at me, "that will be a pleasure. We've been waiting for that bus for thirty-two months."

The Brooklyn routine warmed them up—there was always somebody who'd been waiting for that bus—and from then on it was a jungle picnic. I'd start asking them baseball questions, and they'd fire back the answers with amazing accuracy. Then I'd ask them to ask me questions, and they'd stump me more often than I could give them the correct reply. It got so bad in spots I'd have to work my way out of it.

If a kid asked me a tough question, I'd bring him up on the stage.

"So you think you're a wise guy?" I'd say. "O.K., professor, you answer their questions."

And somebody would ask him a tough one, and he'd stand there scratching his head.

"Stop scratching yourself," I'd yell at him, and remove his hand from his head and start scratching it for him.

He'd stand there for a few seconds, unable to find the solution, and finally I'd say, "You don't know the answer—get the hell off the stage," and blushing, to the razzing of his buddies, he'd leave the stage and I'd bring up the guy who posed the question. This went on for a half-hour, and if we'd had time I guess every kid in the audience would have been in the act.

I spent ten days in and around Finschhaven and you can get to know a guy pretty well in that time, especially when you share his hut and eat with him. I think I got to know the New Guinea soldier, sailor, and Seabee as well as an outsider can.

The first thing you can't miss noticing is that every GI is in

the laundry business. They wash their own clothes, and so did I, and it was a daily ritual for them to be lined up, knee-deep in one of the many brooks that ran near the camps, scrubbing away at their clothes on their homemade washboards. The dust, the mud, and the rain made every day washday. Sometimes we had to line up outside the open-air showers to wait for a chance at the wire scrubbing brush. They always seemed to keep me waiting longest and I'd yell impatiently at them, "Come on, Chinaman, how about giving me a chance to clean up?"

Everybody was "Chinaman" when he was washing. The trouble with washing your clothes in Finschhafen was that, with the rain, you could never get them dry. The boys didn't mind so much, as they had several changes of clothes, and anyway, they wore shorts most of the time, but I, having to travel light, would have to borrow an extra pair of pants. The boys taught me how to dry my things quickly—by hanging them from the side of the jeep, like a flag, as I rode along. It got my clothes dry, all right. What they neglected to tell me was that they would also pick up the dust and the odor as we drove along, leaving me worse off than before.

They were always inventing new gadgets, and when they weren't doing that they'd be ribbing or playing practical jokes on each other. They would "steal" each other's stuff from the huts and hide it, especially pictures, and it was no surprise to see one guy walk into another's tent and scream, "Hey—that's my picture!"

Pictures and letters were their delight, and for the fathers, the pictures were always alike—the mother and the babies. A lot of them hadn't even seen their babies, and they would kid each other as they showed off:

"That's a nice kid—I hope he don't look like you."

Mail delivery was the most popular day in camp. They'd always be on the lookout for the mail trucks and you could see them open their letters, some hastily and others slowly, as if they were afraid to break the spell. Always two or three

pictures would fall out as the letter was opened, and sheepishly they would pick them up and say, "Hey, buddy, ain't that something?"

That was when they started showing them off.

They were all wise to packages. Packages meant something to eat—nobody sends sweaters to New Guinea—and the kid who received a package would disappear suddenly to hide his wares until he could round up his buddies for a feast.

It was heartbreaking to watch the kids who got no mail, and they'd console each other.

"Your mail is probably so heavy, it's coming on a truck all by itself."

In the big camps they had their own post office, especially at the rest camps, where a fellow was slated to stay for a while. In the other camps they kept moving. No one knew how long he'd be in one place.

The GI's had the traditional "hate" for the MP's. They were the cops—the law—and they were cordial but wary of them.

While there was very little fighting among the boys—an occasional argument was only natural—I discovered that New Yorkers, and big-city fellows in general, were not too popular. They were the wise guys in the camps, but strangely enough, in the poker games or the dice games, it was the kids from the small towns or the farms who wound up with the dough.

Neatness was a password with the American soldier. They kept everything clean, and were proud of it. They had their own toilet sets, naturally, but soap, which was hard to get, they hid from each other.

The most remarkable camp I saw, however, was a Filipino camp, completely surrounded by flower gardens. This was war but you'd never know it.

Since their guns were their protection, they were always cleaning them, and they did it not because it was a regulation but because it was a pleasure.

After visiting quite a few camps, I discovered that the pin-up-girl business was nothing more than a press agent's dream.



There would be a few pictures of stars and starlets, but most of the pictures that hung in the huts were pictures that represented home. I don't know exactly how many—but it was quite a few—of the boys took me to their huts to show me a picture of "my girl."

"That's the girl I'm going to marry when I get back," they'd say simply. It was always "when I get back," never "if."

The only pin-up girl the boys got at all excited about was one of their own making. A bald-headed fellow fell asleep in front of his hut one afternoon, so they painted a pin-up girl on his head.

Their ambitions varied but most of them, I learned, wanted to buy farms or jeeps. Most of the kids came off farms, it seems.

For a while I found it tough to get any sleep in one of the camps in Finschhaven. I noticed a sign which read menacingly: "BEWARE OF THE RAT."

I thought it was a gag.

"What's that sign there for?" I inquired. "Are there any Japs left around here?"

They explained to me that every night, at nine o'clock, a big bat and a rat as big as a dog would invade the camp. They never knew which hut they'd come into. To this day I don't know whether they were ribbing me, but I slept with a gun tucked under my pillow every night—I was scared to death of rifles—and until the other huts squawked, kept a light on all night. There were no blackout regulations here. Neither the bat nor the rat showed up, which was all right by me—I must have scared them away.

My activity in Finschhaven covered everything from a daily radio program of fifteen minutes to interviews for the *Foxhole Observer*, and *The Guinea Pig*—"New Guinea's greatest mimeo daily." I covered fourteen hospitals and their wards, including the 126th Station Hospital, the 161st Station Hospital, where I appeared at the dedication of their soft-ball field, the 4th

and 60th General Hospitals, the 2nd Field Hospital, and the Navy Hospital.

In addition to the 91st CB, there were stage shows for the 97th Engineers, the 14th AAA and the 382nd AAA, the 81st Air Force, the Navy, and many other outfits whose numbers I can't recall because I was permitted to take no notes. Most of these units are probably among those who invaded the Philippines with General Douglas MacArthur and once more raised the American flag over Manila.

In the wards I used the same bull-session routine I had used in North Africa. The officer in charge would introduce me with:

"Let me have your attention, men. We have with us a fellow who just came from the States—you probably all know him—Al Schacht, the baseball comedian—who is here to entertain you."

I'd ask them to let their hair down and they didn't need much encouragement. The boys of New Guinea had been overseas a lot longer than the ones I had seen in North Africa. They were veterans of a campaign against a far different enemy and a different type of fighting. They hated their enemy with a fierceness that startled me at first, but they had not lost either their sense of humor or their interest in America's national pastime—baseball.

They piled question after question on me, a good many of them concerning the ball players who were or weren't in uniform. Many of them were surprised when I reeled off the names of the major leaguers in uniform. They had moved too quickly to keep up with the news. I showed them how it took a war to break up the great New York Yankees, with Bill Dickey, Charley Ruffing, Joe DiMaggio, Buddy Hassett, Bill Johnson, George Selkirk, Spud Chandler, Ken Silvestri, Phil Rizutto, Tommy Henrich, and Marius Russo all in uniform.

They expressed their admiration, too, for fellows like Hank Greenberg and Bob Feller, who had been in service almost from the start, and assured me that they knew baseball was



asking no favors. When I finished a show, they left no doubt in my mind that they wanted baseball to continue and that the game gave them a tremendous morale lift.

In almost every ward I would offer a prize for a tough question I asked them, and it's funny but true that whenever I put up a prize they answered the question immediately. When I neglected to make it worth their while, somehow they always missed up.

I'll never forget one kid in one of these wards.

I saw quite a few surgical cases, and this kid was one of the worst. He had most of his jaw shot away but there he was, propped up in a wheel chair at a bull session. He couldn't talk, of course, but I remember he raised his hand when I asked a question. One of the other kids took over and handed him a pencil and a piece of paper. They were always considerate like that.

But the boy in the wheel chair shook his head. He didn't need the pencil and paper. Slowly, he then traced out the word "Yanks" in the air with his fingers. It was the right answer. I congratulated him and his eyes lit up. Just then a doctor came in.

"Excuse me, Al," he said, and then to some GI's who followed him, added, "O.K., men, this is the man. O.K., son, come along with us. We're going to fix up that jaw right now."

A hush fell over the ward but as they started wheeling the kid out of the room, the others started talking to him, encouraging him—as if he needed courage.

"Good luck, buddy . . . don't worry, kid, it'll be all right . . . take it easy, now . . . good luck, good luck . . . good luck."

They stopped wheeling him for a moment and the boy looked around at his worried buddies. They were ailing, too, but they were worried about everybody but themselves. You can't grin with no jaw and a rubber tube deep in your nose, but this kid looked around and around and winked. Then he raised his right hand, put his thumb and index finger together in that universal sign that means "Everything's gonna be all

right," and then he winked again—and, so help me, what was left of his face was grinning as they wheeled him toward the operating room. You can't lick a guy like that, and if what I have seen of service surgery means anything, that kid has a better-looking jaw than I have right now.

One particular night in Finschhaven there were some championship bouts scheduled. I can't recall the company that was staging these fights, although I think the 33rd Division had something to do with it, and perhaps it wasn't even in Finschhaven, but aside from the geographical details I remember everything as if it happened yesterday.

My part in this affair was to put on my one-man prize fight, a nonsensical bit of pantomime in which I proceed to punch away at an imaginary opponent and also to absorb a good deal of punishment myself.

Earlier that day a friend of mine, Dr. Samuel Berg, brother of Moe Berg, the educated ball player who was my teammate on the Washington Senators and the Boston Red Sox for many years, presented me with a bottle of Australian gin and six cans of beer. That's quite a treat in these parts, and I planned to make a party of it when the night's work was done. I have always made it a habit never to drink before a show. I lay all my eggs sober.

The beer didn't impress me but the gin was different. It's hard to get any kind of liquor here and the only drink you could get was occasionally a GI invention called "jungle juice" and which you drank at your own risk. Anticipating the fun I would have with that bottle of gin, I kept it a secret, wrapping it securely in paper and carrying it with me from show to show. I even got hold of a couple of cans of grapefruit juice to use as a mix.

I was in a hut, getting dressed for my act, when the chaplain who was in charge of the boxing program informed me that the rain was too heavy for any fighting to be done—the ring was full of water from the unusually heavy downpour—and the only thing left for them to do was to call the whole

thing off. There were about fifteen thousand soldiers sitting in the rain, waiting for things to start, and if they could stand it, so could I.

The chaplain was tickled when I told him I would go on with my part of the act, anyway, and he suggested I go into another hut to finish dressing—or undressing, in this case, since I was going out there in my shorts and a pair of boxing gloves. The hut I'd been in was full of soldiers who had come in for my autograph and were pounding away at me with questions.

I explained to the chaplain that I needed three soldiers to act as my seconds, a towel, a stool, and a bottle of water. From the crowd he picked out three boys, and while moving to another hut I gave them their instructions. At the end of the first round, when the gong sounded, I would take a fall and one of the seconds was to drag me back to my corner; but instead of sitting me on the stool, he was to sit down and instead of him fanning me with the towel, I was to fan him. That was all they had to do. But it seems I neglected one important item—I forgot all about my bottle of gin.

Ready for action, I entered the ring, stood in the center with the water reaching almost to my knees, and announced over the loud-speaker: "Boys, I have never been in better shape for a fight."

And as I said this I flopped right on my face into the water, causing a terrific splash. The kids liked that but it's a wonder I wasn't drowned.

To my corner I went and looked around for my seconds. They were nowhere to be seen. I couldn't hold up the act any longer—the rain was heavier than ever—and I started sparring away, finally going down from a blow to the chin. As I went down, the bell rang, and I looked around for the second to drag me back to my corner. Not seeing any of the three, I pretended to swim back to the stool, and then I saw my seconds, staggering toward the ring. Under other conditions I would say immediately that these boys were drunk, but with

the water so deep and the footing so uncertain, it might be that they were merely slipping as they walked.

"The bottle!" I yelled at them as they approached. "The bottle of water."

This was the part where they were to give me a sip of water to revive me.

One of the boys rushed up with a bottle and as he brought it to my lips I took one look at the label. It was the same label that was on my bottle of gin. I took a sip but this wasn't gin. It was water, and for the first time I noticed that my seconds were laughing themselves sick and so was everybody else around me. Gin is too rare here to have two bottles around in one day—especially with the same label.

I still don't know how those kids discovered my gin, with all the precautions I had taken, but some time later they apologized to me and presented me with another bottle. They must have sent all the way to Australia to get it, and I asked them to join me in finishing that one, too.

## 12. THE SEVENTH-INNING STRETCH

I HAVE appeared as a clown in twenty-one of the last twenty-four World Series of the major leagues in the United States, but the World Series that gave me my greatest thrill was played in Hollandia, New Guinea, on Sunday, October 1, 1944.

Hollandia is in the north-central portion of New Guinea, directly under the equator, and the last thing you think of out here, where the heat is scorching, is a World Series. But what a World Series it turned out to be.

There were some thirty-five thousand soldiers of General Yaeger's 24th Division here, waiting for the signal to shove off for the Philippines invasion, and I can safely say that the show they put on for me topped everything I have ever seen in a World Series at home.

Before the game the 24th Division band boomed and blasted away, with me leading them, and then I went on with my act. This was not a soft-ball game, as was the case in most of the ball games throughout New Guinea, but regulation hard baseball, and it was with a slight touch of homesickness that I gave them my versions of the conceited and nearsighted pitchers, working my way into impersonations of the great stars of past and present—Babe Ruth, Bob Feller, Walter Johnson, and Mel Ott, among others. Every time I announced I was going to impersonate someone, the GI's would yell out the names of their particular favorites, and they had me a bit dizzier than usual by the time the ball game was ready to begin.

It was my custom to announce the first inning over the loud-speaker as my version of how you would hear a ball game on the air, and I got on the mike when I saw General Yaeger

striding out to the mound to throw out the first ball. I had met the General earlier and the boys had made me feel like a big shot by making me pose for pictures with him. The General was a short, stocky, good-natured gentleman and highly respected by his men not only for his ability as a leader in battle but for a grand sense of humor.

There he was coming to the mound, and there I was on the mike. I couldn't resist the temptation, knowing that it would be taken in the spirit of fun.

"Now General Yaeger," I announced, "will throw out the first ball. The General will run around the ball park twenty times so he can get in shape to throw the ball."

Sitting and standing all around the air strip where the game was being played, the soldiers roared.

"I'll bet a hundred to one," I continued, "that the General don't even get the ball up to the home plate—he's going to bounce it."

Sure enough, the General wound up—he was laughing so hard he could barely throw the ball—and bounced it up to the plate. As he walked off the field, I stuck in the clincher.

"All right, General," I declared, "you can now take your shower."

The GI's and the General were still laughing when the ball game began. And what a ball game! One team had an all-pro line-up that included ex-big-leaguers Master Sergeant Hugh Mulcahy, Philly pitcher, the first major-league player to enter the Army; Staff Sergeant Ken Silvestri, New York Yankee catcher; T-4 Al Flair, Boston Red Sox first baseman; big-league prospects T-5 Al Kozar and Sergeant George Byam, of the Red Sox; Irv Duask, St. Louis Cardinals; Pfc Louis Rosen, Yankees; and former minor-leaguers Pfc Lou Roede, Chattanooga, T-4 Carmel Castle, Birmingham, and T-4 Jack Griffore, Columbus.

Mulcahy, who was one of the best pitchers in the National League when he joined up, and Silvestri, Bill Dickey's understudy as a catcher, were the stars of the game, which was

close and keenly fought all the way. The former Philly pitcher went into the game as a relief pitcher in the seventh, with the bases loaded, and went on to win. He filled the bases again in the ninth, but got out of that hole, too, while Silvestri was the guy who did the damaging hitting.

Our American boys are full of surprises like this World Series game in the heat of New Guinea. They even had a night baseball game, with floodlights of their own making that gave a better playing light than most minor-league ball-park lighting systems.

Traveling, whether it is by plane or jeep, is dangerous in most parts of New Guinea. Atmospheric conditions made flying tough because you never know when you're going to hit bad weather, but from the way these Air Force fellows around here do it, you'd think they were walking across the street. They not only never worried about it but rarely had an accident. I still get palpitations of the liver thinking about the flight that took me from Finschhafen to Hollandia, with the pilot skimming not only the trees but also the waves.

My respect for GI jeep and truck drivers went up several thousand per cent after my first experience on a Hollandia road. This road was on the mountain, with a sheer drop to the ocean below, and it was narrow. There were trucks coming and going on this road and any mistake meant an accident. The GI's handled the wheel as if it were a toy, but reckless or not, they could drive.

Traffic was one of the big problems here, I learned. There were MP's all along the roads, acting as traffic cops, and anybody caught going over ten miles an hour—the speed limit—was punished, the sentence depending on the seriousness of the charge. The most severe punishment was usually an assignment to digging graves. There wasn't too much speeding.

Hollandia, at the time I was there, was the headquarters of General MacArthur, and although I didn't have the privilege of meeting the great leader, the boys pointed out the house



he called home—a beautiful house on top of a hill. Right near his home was the war correspondents' headquarters, and there I renewed old friendships with George Lait, of International News Service, a writing veteran of the campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, and a guy who kept getting so close to the action he was always getting wounded. George not only was cited for his deeds but also received the Purple Heart.

There was also Henry McLemore, a sergeant in Public Relations, who had dwindled from a heavyweight down to a flyweight.

I was always meeting people I knew, and it's a funny thing that one kid I wanted to meet in Hollandia I never got to see. J. G. Taylor Spink, publisher of the *Sporting News*, which was one of the few newspapers from the States to get here regularly, asked me to look up his son, Seaman Charles Spink, but the kid must have learned I was looking for him. There were perhaps a thousand ships always in Hollandia harbor, and he managed to stay well hidden on one of them.

Always there was the feeling that something was going to happen—something big. When you're around MacArthur, there's a tenseness in the air and everybody is moving fast. At night the ships would be lighted up like a baseball stadium at a night game, and it bothered me.

"Why," I asked one sailor, "do they have those lights on with the Japs so close?"

"My friend," said the kid confidently, "we want the yellow bellies to see those lights. We're inviting them over. That's the only way we can get them to fight."

It was in Hollandia that I got my first view of Jap prisoners, and they were a scrawny, disgusting lot. There were still plenty of Japs in this sector, hiding away in the caves in the hills, and every day the boys would go out on what they called "snipe hunts" to try to drive a few out of the caves. Eventually hunger drove them out and quite a number of times some were found on our own mess lines, in American uniform. We had quite a few American Japanese in our own Army here,



and it was difficult to tell them apart, especially when they wore the same uniform.

This was the enemy, and a thoroughly hated one he was. The boys had little respect for the fighting ability of the Japs and were so bitter against them for their sneaky tactics and their cruelty that, were it not for the strict training and the American belief in sticking to the rules, there would be very few Japanese prisoners taken alive.

I got a firsthand account of this feeling from a kid who'd been over here almost thirty months, and had been wounded in one of the battles. He was fully recovered now, but his mind was not at peace. He had lost a brother at Guadalcanal and he told me earnestly, in answer to a question about when he was getting his leave, that there were no thoughts of a furlough for him as yet.

"Al," he said, "I'm not going home till I get one Jap."

It was not, as many believe, a desire to kill that made these kids feel that way, but one to avenge the many below-the-belt punches thrown by the Japs. Several days after the boy told me this, I met him again. He had just come in from a routine scouting march, and there was a funny, happy light in his eyes and a faint smile on his lips.

I asked him where he'd been and he told me.

"I was on a Jap patrol," he replied simply.

"See any Japs?" I inquired.

He didn't answer that question directly and he seemed reluctant to say any more, but I knew what he meant when he said, "I can go home now, Al."

My own experience with a Jap prisoner was a funny one. About a hundred fifty of them were brought in from the hills one day and, not really expecting an answer, I asked one, "How do you like the way Americans fight, yellow belly?"

He startled me when he said, "Well, Aussies fight pretty good—chop head off. American, he first clean out jungle, then fight."

The Australians, he meant, didn't waste much time in a fight, while the Americans chased them into the hills and then blasted them out.

"Do you think you've got a chance to win the war?" I prodded him.

He gave me what is probably the most classic of all replies.

"Well, Americans may get us out of Oregon but Americans will never get us out of San Francisco."

The Japs were obviously masters of propaganda, which they had their own stupid men believing. It was here in Hollandia that I saw their tactics for the first time, their efforts at wrecking the morale of the American boys through every dirty way possible. They didn't figure on the GI, however, and the pamphlets they dropped as well as the short-wave ramblings of Tokyo Rose were treated with contempt and wisecracks. The pamphlets, as well as Tokyo Rose, aimed through sex and other means at making the GI more homesick than he was. But far from being disheartened, the boys would deliberately tune in to Tokyo Rose for a daily morale boost.

I stood around with the kids and listened to Tokyo Rose and their comments.

"Hello, suckers," was her usual beginning. "I've got some records today but first here's a tip to you men. We'll be over to bomb you at six-forty-five tomorrow morning."

"Thanks, Rosie," a soldier would say. "We'll be waiting."

And that's the way it worked out, it seems. She tells us when and where the Japs are coming and the Japs come on schedule and get knocked down like so many clay pigeons.

"Well, suckers," Rose would continue, "how do you like fighting and dying in the jungles while your girl friends and your wives cheat back home with the 4-F's?"

"Is she kidding?" was a typical American reply to that. "There ain't a 4-F left in my town. I was the last one."

"Why don't you go home, suckers? You'd like that," she would prattle on.

"What!" some kid would shout. "And leave this beautiful island paradise? Come on, Rosie, how about a record?"

It almost seemed that she was listening to the wisecracks of the boys, for she'd come right back with: "Say, suckers, you'll like this record...it's Bing Crosby. And you know what he's singing? 'White Christmas.' Yours won't be white."

And some kid from the South would drawl, "Mahn nevah was, honey—so play that record."

In her own peculiar way, therefore, Tokyo Rose was a big source of entertainment for our boys, just as Lord Haw-Haw was in North Africa. The boys would sit for hours listening to her play the best American records, and many times they would have jam sessions to the swingy ones, jitterbugging all over the place. If that was meant to get the kids dejected and homesick enough to surrender, as they were politely requested to do both over the air and in the elaborately printed throwaways, it had an entirely opposite effect.

Probably the most popular items in New Guinea were the phonograph, the radio, and the camera. Most camps had at least one phonograph and it always seemed to be playing. Radios were much scarcer and during the World Series in St. Louis as many as ten thousand boys would gather from all parts of the jungle to crowd around a radio to listen to the short-wave broadcast. This is as good an answer to the question "Should baseball continue?" as any I came across.

The guy with a camera was a favorite son in any camp. Everybody wanted a picture taken to send home, and you'd see one fellow pose for a picture and suddenly there were twenty-five other guys in the picture with him.

The press photographers often gave the kids a break by presenting them with prints of groups and they, as well as the war correspondents, were well liked. I roomed with George Lait, Frank Prist of Los Angeles, an Acme photographer, and Bill Chickering of *Time*, and was greatly distressed to read that Prist and Chickering were both killed in the invasion of the Philippines. They are noncombatants

technically, but they take all the risks of the front-line soldier, and all have taken jumps with the paratroopers so that they can be on hand to give an eye-view account of the battles.

The kids called Hollandia "The Paris of New Guinea" because the food was better there than on the other islands, possibly because it was headquarters for the New Guinea area, and more probably because there were so many ships coming and going with fresh supplies.

With the exception of the differences in heat and rainfall, all the places in New Guinea seemed alike to me, but the kids who kept hopping from one spot to another kept knocking each other's islands. If a guy had just come in from Finschhaven, Hollandia was a lousy place to camp in, but two weeks later he would tell a new group from Finschhaven that Hollandia was the greatest spot in the South Pacific.

One of the favorite pastimes of the leisure moments was "hut hopping." At night, just before going to bed, groups of the boys would gather in this hut or that hut, and under dim lights would carry on discussions, play cards, or go in for more energetic games like dice. Birthday parties were daily occurrences—it was always somebody's birthday—and they would chip in whatever goodies they had for the occasion. If it wasn't a birthday, it was somebody going home on a long-awaited leave—and that, too, called for a party.

It was so hot in Hollandia that the canvas tops of the huts would sizzle under the sun, and during the day most of the sitting was done under the huts, most of which were built on stilts. If you washed something it dried before you could hang it up.

One experience in a hospital in Hollandia I'll never forget. I don't know whether it was at the 71st or 79th General Hospital but I visited a "psych" ward, which is a tough assignment anywhere. Most of the kids in these wards were a little more nervous or more homesick than the rest, and many had not even been in battle. Few of those I saw were serious cases and just as any of the others, they were inter-

ested in baseball. I'd get a lot of questions, some a bit on the silly side, but the one I still can't answer was asked me by a colored boy.

"Al," he said, "are all ball players crazy?"

He was looking directly at me when he said it.

## 13. NINTH-INNING RALLY

THE World Series of St. Louis was still the favorite topic of conversation when I left Hollandia for a place called Biak. Nobody told me where Biak was and I thought I was going for another one of the short flights over the jungles to another New Guinea camp.

Biak turned out to be in another league entirely, and about a thousand miles from Hollandia. In the Dutch East Indies there is an island called Celebes, and right at the northeastern tip is Biak, freshly captured from the Japs at the time by the famous 41st Division.

A B-25 took me to Biak, and I was riding what you call "piggy back" in the great little fighter plane. There were a lot of other places I would rather have been than in that plane, flying about two feet off the ocean, and with me almost numb from not being able to move around. Any minute I was afraid a wave might hit us and pull us down, and when the pilot told me weather conditions were so bad that we might have to turn back, I got that three-on-and-none-out feeling all over again. But miraculously, like all these wonderful flying fellows seem to do things, he got in through the clouds to make a perfect landing on a dime, and there we were in Biak.

Celebes is even closer to the equator than New Guinea and, as usual, it was raining and hot when we arrived. In fact, it was the worst rain I had seen to date, and my first show here was called off. There must have been at least ten thousand kids waiting in the terrific downpour for the show to go on. They were in the rain and I was on a covered stage, and I just couldn't go on with the show under those conditions.

I promised to come back the next day and we held the most intimate stage affair of my entire trip.

There were more than seventy thousand soldiers of the 41st Division here—a division headed by General Jens A. Doe—and one which had been through almost every important battle in the West Pacific area. These kids were hungry for a little relaxation and they didn't need any encouragement to take it.

I must have brought at least a hundred of the boys, one by one and sometimes in groups, up on the stage with me during the question-and-answer sessions, and I even developed something new for my piano recital so that the kids could join me in the act. I asked for a detail of ten soldiers, and then lined them up according to size. There was a big piano on the stage and as I started to explain the piano recital to the audience, I instructed the detail on where to shove the piano.

"This is a very difficult recital," I said, and turning to the boys on the stage mauling the piano around, I instructed: "A little over this way—no, that way."

I could never make up my mind where the piano should be placed, and obediently they moved it here and there and everywhere. One by one I found fault with the way they moved it, and kicked them off the stage until I was left with the smallest of the ten. I turned around to give him his orders and there he was, leaning against the piano, and he wouldn't budge.

"What's the matter, buddy?" I asked. "Union?"

"No," he declared calmly, "but I am going to play this piano."

"Oh, you are," said I. "Well, if that's the case, what should I do?"

"You're going to move it for me," he replied, and sure enough, with everybody laughing his head off, I moved the piano for him. And he really gave me the business. Finally,



when he was satisfied that I had done enough piano moving, he sat down at the keyboard.

"What do you want me to play?" he asked.

I thought he was ribbing me and probably couldn't play a note, so I picked out what I figured was a tough piece—the "Rhapsody in Blue."

This kid may not have been as good as the best, but he was good enough. For more than ten minutes he gave us an exhibition of everything from the classics to ragtime, just a few bars of a composition or a song, and the reception he received was tremendous. It was hard for me to follow him and I told them so.

The next day, Friday, October 13, I appeared at a championship ball game at Bosnek Field, and was given another treat. I saw one of the greatest competitive exhibitions of my entire baseball career. The American League beat the National League, four to nothing, and pitchers Sanford, Wakeham, and Pahmahmie didn't allow a hit or a run. Picture a no-hit, no-run game in the jungles of the Southwest Pacific. These kids really played baseball, too.

Before the game, I gave Major General Doe the same kind of ribbing I had given General Yaeger in Hollandia.

"Go to the clubhouse and get a good rubdown," I told the General, to the delight of his men, as he failed to reach the plate with the first ball.

The umpires got a little working on, too. The first pitch of the game was a perfect strike.

"Strike," the umpire called.

"He's a cockeyed liar," I shouted, and the boys loved it.

From then on it was their show, and they certainly put it on. There were no professional ball players on either team, but they were better than average material for any major-league ball club.

On the subject of vital statistics, I learned from General Doe that when the 41st Division captured Biak from the Japs, they also captured enough Japanese beer for every one



of the seventy-seven thousand soldiers to have at least one quart. It was surprisingly good beer, I discovered later.

There were quite a few Jap prisoners here, and some spoke fairly good English. I asked one of them if they still played baseball in Japan.

"No," he replied, "no play since war."

"Ever see Babe Ruth play in Japan, Itchy?" I inquired.

"Ah, yes," he said, "Babe Ruth play. I see him... he hit ball once, and I no see ball. He very good."

The ratio of casualties around those parts, they told me, was thirty-one Japs to one American.

The morale in the 41st Division was marvelous. These boys were hardened veterans, but they also knew how to play. They had all kinds of recreation, including tennis and plenty of music from records and their own band.

It was here that I met the "best damned bomb group in the world," the famous "Jolly Rogers," whose records in combat were truly sensational. You can't mention any other flying squadron to these boys—they'd laugh you right out of camp. It was here, too, that I almost met Major Richard Bong, the top Pacific ace. I believe he once flew with the Jolly Rogers. I missed him at Biak by about five minutes.

The true courage and greatness of the American fliers can never be fully described in mere words, and I was privileged to see them come back from combat missions a few times. On one occasion I heard the ambulance bells clanging wildly as the cars raced to the air strip. One of the planes was crippled, they told me, and when the crew refused to bail out, the pilot was going to make a crash landing without wheels.

I watched the ship come in and miraculously land on its belly, as if things like that happened every day. The pilot, a colonel, stepped nonchalantly out of the bomber and lit a cigarette. His crew, one by one, walked methodically away, and as they passed him the Colonel said, "Passing by, boys."

Only a few seconds before these fellows didn't know whether they were going to live or die. Their devotion to

their leaders and the plane they were part of bordered on the fanatic.

There was another air base, a small one called Owi, right near Biak and I was taken there for a quick show for an Air Force group. I had flown in all types of planes, ridden in trucks and in jeeps, but this time I got the idea of how a soldier feels on his way to an invasion. My means of transportation was a landing boat.

You stand in it, seeing nothing except the sky overhead, with the boat going so fast the waves—and the water is rough in these parts—go over the boat and over you. I tried to imagine how the kids feel, jammed into these boats and not knowing where they are heading or how long it will take them until they drop the front and the invasion is on.

From Biak I was ordered to Milne Bay, which is at the southeast end of New Guinea, and a flight of over a thousand miles. My orders, handed me on the fifteenth of October, read that it was imperative for headquarters to get me to Milne Bay by the sixteenth. That isn't exactly walking around the bases, and I knew that those boys at Milne Bay and the other bases I had been would soon be off for something big.

Everywhere—in Biak, in Hollandia, and in Finschhafen—I had seen these signs of activity. The ships loading up with supplies and equipment, thousands of soldiers packing up and preparing to break camp, soldiers on the docks in full pack, waiting to board the ships.

While nobody knew definitely except the leaders, everybody guessed that the Philippines was the next stop and there were many soldiers who said to me, "Gosh, Al, I hope they don't leave me behind when that invasion starts. I want to be in there when we go back to the Philippines."

The invasion of the Philippines meant not only the settlement of the most bitter grudge of all against the Japs, but also that they'd be coming home that much sooner. None of them wanted to be left on the already captured islands where they would have to spend an indefinite period of time.

Everywhere there was tension in the air, but it was not nervousness or fear. I'd mingle with the boys before and after a show on a dock. I did many shows on the docks of Hollandia and Biak, where my audience consisted strictly of kids about to depart for points unknown, and they would talk of everything but the fight they were going to take part in.

"Do you know where you're going, buddy?" I asked one kid.

"What the hell is the difference," he told me, "as long as there are yellow bellies there?"

Milne Bay was one of New Guinea's bloodiest battle-grounds, and it took the Americans to save the Australians there. It was now a CB base and there, too, the activity was tremendous. But despite the job ahead of them, these Navy men found time to play. On the afternoon of the seventeenth I appeared at a ball game, and until the twentieth I was kept busy doing shows at near-by hospitals, and for thousands of sailors and Seabees right on the docks.

My time was almost up in the South Pacific, but I knew we would never lose the war against Japan. The boys of New Guinea and Biak and Owi—the soldiers, the sailors, and the airmen—were the most confident bunch of boys I ever saw. They knew they could lick the Japs if they found them and that it was only a matter of time. But while they are patient, light, and carefree about the whole thing, it makes you feel humble, with a sense of futility, watching them prepare for battle. You watch them, knowing some of them may never come out of it alive, and what do they do—they sit on their packs on the docks waiting for the signal to board ship, and play cards.

This was the American boy in the Pacific and it was with that picture imprinted on my mind that I left Milne Bay for Natzab and the start of my return trip home.

## 14. THE SUMMARIES—RUNS, HITS, ERRORS

EVERY ball game must have its summary of runs, hits, and errors, and some of them you always keep remembering.

I have been home since October 26, 1944, and the feeling of restlessness has been greater in me since then than it was after my return from North Africa, especially since the war on all fronts has begun to look as if the ninth inning is in sight with the home team far ahead.

There must have been at least five hundred boys in the Eastern area who had given me the addresses and phone numbers of their close ones—it might have been a mother or dad, or an aunt or uncle, a wife or a girl friend, and for more than a few, just a friend—and for several weeks I was kept busy making calls. I had to wait almost two weeks to do it. My baggage, with all the numbers, had been left in Natzab, and it was in a dirty uniform, with Morrie Arnovich's jungle boots still on my feet, and a trench coat that I walked into my place of business on a Monday night and started seating people.

Those bits of paper on which the New Guinea GI's had scribbled their messages home were worth waiting for. There was not much I could say to anybody, except that I had seen their men in New Guinea and that they were doing fine, and their reactions to this "reunion" made me feel all the more futile.

"We'll never forget you for this," they cried. "You have done a marvelous thing."

Their men and kids do all the work at the risk of their lives and they thank me for dialing a telephone.

Talking to these relatives and friends of the greatest bunch of GI's on any man's earth made me recall the little speech

I made to them in the hospitals and in the camps—a speech I first made with fear in my heart because I didn't want to offend them or insult their intelligence. It would have broken my heart to have those kids walk out on me, and I had been warned against "waving the flag" or telling them what a great job they were doing. I had learned in North Africa that they needed no praise and wanted none for doing a job they were called on to do.

There were many boys, especially in the hospitals where they had more time for thinking, who were puzzled by the news of strikes at home, and while most regarded it as more enemy propaganda, I did get questions like this: "Al, do the folks at home know there's a war going on?"

It's tough to answer something like that. Who am I to be the judge of that when it was these kids themselves who had taught me the fact that there was a war going on? But you can't keep on ducking questions because then they would feel that something was wrong at home, and finally I found the answer.

"Fellows," I would say after every stage show in a hospital or camp, "a lot of you have asked me if the folks at home know there's a war going on. You have a right to ask this question and I know you didn't ask it to be fresh or embarrass me. My show here is over and I had a lot of fun and hope you did, too. I just want to hold you for a minute or two to answer what you've asked me. I know you fellows don't want me to wave the American flag in your faces and that's the last thing I'll ever do.

"Do the folks at home know there's a war going on? They sure do, fellows. Nearly everyone, as you know, has someone close to him in the service. They worry about you as much as you worry about them. They not only worry but they work. Where do you think the thousands of ships and planes, and trucks and jeeps, and guns and ammunition are coming from? They don't grow on trees. They have to be made.

"And where do you think the money comes from to pay for

those things? When we put on a bond drive it never fails to go over the top. Why, I can recall where a popular sports writer by the name of Bill Corum sponsored a bond baseball game at the Polo Grounds. Everybody had to buy a bond to get in. Fellows, there were fifty-five thousand people at that game, and the receipts were close to one billion dollars.

"You ask about the strikes. Sure, we have a few strikes, but in a country of a hundred thirty-five million people there are bound to be a few crackpots. But they haven't hurt the war effort as much as the enemy would have you believe. You fellows didn't want any part of this. We are not an aggressive nation. The enemy forced you into this. If our country wants anybody in the service, Uncle Sam just puts a hand on his shoulder. This is a young man's war—your war—and you are fighting mostly for yourselves and your children. The folks back home are the has-beens, a lot of them having fought the last war thinking that one was the last. It's now up to you to make sure this one is.

"And when it's all over, and I hope it's sooner than you hope or expect, and you return home and take another look at our shores—and after looking at the other shores, I don't care where you go, if it's away from home you'll be in a town called 'No place'—you will say: 'Gee, I was glad to go out and fight for this joint.'"

They knew I meant what I said and it is with deep gratitude that I listened to their cheers, the most welcome music I ever heard as a clown or a ball player.

There are a lot of things that keep coming back, little things like something a kid said to me on the transport coming home. This boy had been a gunner on a bomber and had gone through sixty-four missions without a scratch, although I know his plane had been in more than one tight spot. The transport was having a pretty rough time of it—we were all rolling around on the floor like a bunch of tenpins after a strike hit—and we were just over historic Bougainville, when the gunner said, "I'm over here thirty-two months knocking



my brains out without any accidents, and this transport pilot's going to drop me in the ocean on my furlough."

Every day there's at least one of these boys with a sense of humor you can't beat dropping in on me to say hello or sending me a picture he had snapped of me in a camp of New Guinea. The watch I wear is a gift from the 210th AA, presented to me on the Seventh of October in Hollandia. It was made from the metal parts of a Jap Zero. And there's the beautifully made stone ash tray with the inscription: "From the Happy Hooligans, U. S. Army—Italy, 1944."

In Oran, the manager of one of the many baseball teams had asked me how his ball club looked.

"You look like a bunch of happy hooligans," I told him kiddingly, and that's what he named his team.

These memories and the souvenirs, the welcome visits of the kids and their occasional letters from overseas to say hello help to take away the strain of doing practically nothing. I'm at home and they're still at it. It makes me feel like I'm accomplishing little in life, although I realize that I wasn't kidding when I told them that the folks at home are the "has-beens" and that it's a young man's war.

While I was with them, living with them, I had more fun than when I was home. I went over to entertain and they entertained me. I was an "old man" and they taught me how to live.

Only recently Colonel Charles Miller, the fellow of the "big dogs" of Oran, paid me a visit. Frankly, we got quite plastered together, and we enjoyed ourselves talking over the past. Then suddenly he said, "Al, do you remember that Johnston kid who stooged for you in that ball game for the Sixty-first General Hospital in Oran?"

I remembered. "How's he doing?" I asked. "He was a great kid and a good catcher."

"He won't catch any more," replied Colonel Miller sadly. "He died of wounds in Italy. You were the last guy he talked about, Al. The chaplain was about to say the last rites for

him and he asked him which of his belongings he wanted to send home. The kid could barely talk but of all his things, the one he most wanted his brother to have was a baseball. It was the ball you autographed for him that afternoon in Oran."

There was nothing I could say to that, and the only reason I tell this story is that it's typical of the American GI to remember the little things. They fought, they played, and more than a few are still paying with their lives for the privilege of defending their right to live and let live. They asked people like me for an autograph when it is we who should be asking for theirs.

That's why I want to go over again—if they'll let me.



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